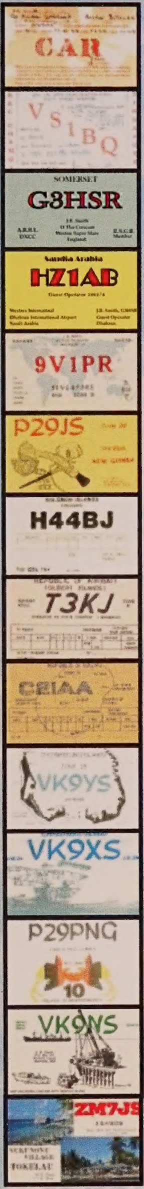
The Old Timer

James B. Smith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CE1AA
VK9YS
VK9XS
P29PNG
VK9NS
ZM7JS
TOKELAU

VK0JS
P29JS
T30JS
T33JS
NO1Z KH1
T31JS
Tutuila Isl.
WR1Z/KH8
WR1Z / KH9
VU2JBS
H40AB
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION

60 Years in the hobby of
Amateur Radio 1947 - 2007

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July 2010

THE OLD TIMER

60 years in Amateur Radio

The Old Timer
60 years in Amateur Radio

This account covers the whole range of my activities within the world of Amateur Radio. One of the best remembered activities is the DXpedition to Heard Island in 1983 – I had been licensed a mere 36 years by then!

It has been a wonderful experience.

James B Smith (Jim), VK9NS.

Front cover designed by James B Smith and produced by Larry Gandy, AH8LG

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Australia

This book is dedicated to Jean, our four children, Bruce, Stuart, Sheena, Fraser and my 9 grand children.

To my wife Kirsti, VK9NL, for my 27 years on Norfolk Island and to my Amateur Radio friends world wide. It has been quite a journey.

Preface

It is said that everyone has the makings of a book in one's head. It is natural, in a way, that as individuals we make our way in the world and life, each of us collecting huge amounts of information. Some of this input to our brain is vitally important for our personal survival. Without these basics of 'life's knowledge' our life span would be under continual threat. So, in a way, some hobby or another has the capability of allowing us breathing space, time off from the real or imaginary hazards of the world.

As I look at myself in this book's 1935 picture of myself, it makes me think. The world today is certainly a completely different place of, say, the days of 1935. If, in those far off days, someone with Amateur Radio knowledge had attempted to move my mind to this hobby, my guess is that my response would have been zero. Then again, maybe not!

Yet, in hindsight, armed with several bound issues of several Amateur Radio magazines of the 30's, I realise that Amateur Radio was already a hobby with an international clout and interest. My mind in 1935 would have been blank to the idea of a highly organised system embracing literally the whole world. Of course, in these days of the early 2000's, the radio amateur is aware of this international outlook. It is the basis of our hobby; we know our Amateur Radio license prefix is unique to the individual countries and area. Each of us becomes individuals in an Amateur Radio sense by our complete callsign. Our callsign becomes the reflection of ourselves.

For obvious reasons, I chose 1935 to have a 'look see' at our hobby a mere 72 years ago. It is amazing how much things have changed since those earlier days. However, it must also be said that a great deal has remained in place: a sure sign of solid foundations. Several international Amateur Radio Societies were already in place in the 30's and they are still around today. Of course, the magazines of these societies, in their monthly (or whatever) issues, cater for their own radio amateurs. However a turn of some page or another, and one is immediately in an area of international outlook.

It was a surprise to note that in the mid 30's; the

International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) listed some 60 or so Amateur Radio QSL bureaus. As you will read later in this book, in a 1935 issue of the ARRL *QST* magazine, the ARRL DXCC programme was in its infancy. But it was a truly international programme.

In the quickest of searches through those 1935 issues of *QST* (for example), one becomes immediately aware of the huge range of parts and wireless equipment available. Look through any issue of these various magazines, and one immediately sees the numerous articles on experiments, suggestions for this receiver, that transmitter, antenna, or whatever. The pool of Amateur Radio expertise in the world of wireless communications became a huge national asset for many countries in the coming world war in 1939. My picture reflects no worries about this future at all; the coming of this major insult to the entire human race. Sometimes it appears that we learn nothing. However, the skills of the radio amateurs led the world of Wireless and were put to good use in WWII.

Our world of today moves at an incredible rate, growing faster, in a sense, daily. Our hobby of Amateur Radio is also changing (as indeed it must do) at an incredible speed. In that picture I do not see the elimination of the Morse code as a hobby (license) requirement. But, then again, I had no knowledge of this method of communications. Battleships flew flags and flashed lights, but I knew nothing about Wireless (Radio) communications. A possible obvious exception is the image of the domestic wireless on our sideboard – I suppose a basic part of our daily world in those far off days.

It is a strange and exciting world.

Jim, VK9NS

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Chapter 1

THE EARLY DAYS

It had been a pleasant journey leaving Hobart down the Derwent River heading for its exit into the Southern Ocean.

After months of careful planning, we were finally on our way to meet our individual and collective goals as a coherent group. A heady cocktail of excitement, pleasure and camaraderie infused us all; we were bound for high adventure on Heard Island. The Island lies in the Southern Ocean at 53.07S and 73.20E and is over 2,000 miles from Western Australia.

Our vessel, the Cheynes II, finally broke free from the shelter of the heavenly peace and beauty of Tasmania - and headed straight into a raging nightmare! Of course, we each knew the expressions 'the Roaring Forties' and 'the Screaming Fifties' in a descriptive sense as applied to the elemental might of the Southern Ocean, but to be there for real was soon to become a huge test of our resolve and courage.

In this relatively small 500 ton, 145 foot steel ex-whale chaser, each of us now came face to with the awesome might of this notorious ocean, whipped into a fury by gale force winds.

The sea was running with twenty-foot waves, and the illusion of our small vessel climbing up the steep wave front, followed by an exhilarating roller-coaster ride to the bottom, was an awesome and very humbling experience repeated over and over without respite.

Several of the crew and members of our group were out on a heaving open deck, checking and securing lashings holding down our equipment. It was highly dangerous work. I freely confess that at that moment a large question mark appeared between my fear and exhilaration. What the hell was I doing on this highly dangerous Amateur Radio expedition to a remote island over 2,000 miles from Hobart?

My wife Kirsti and I were both radio amateurs and were joint expedition leaders of our group. How was it that, despite Amateur Radio being an international, highly respected hobby, some 'freak of nature' was apparently quite ready to scuttle our venture, perhaps even claiming our lives in the process? It all seemed a bit unfair.

The human mind thinks of the strangest of things in times of crisis. There, in early 1983 on that perilous sea, with waves threatening to swamp our frail craft, I found myself thinking back about my more than 35 years in this hobby called Amateur Radio. How had it all started? What had brought me to this inhospitable and remote corner of the planet?

Perhaps the words and chapters that lie ahead in this book will show how and why it all came to pass. How a chance gift from an aunt some 60 years earlier had in due course dragged me screaming and kicking into the hobby which was to become so personally rewarding. Hold tight and read on, it will be an interesting ride...

* * * * * * * *

I was born in Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland in October 1928. My father and his brothers and sisters inherited a sizeable sum of money from their mother (then living in Edinburgh) on her death. All her children had been born in Aberdeenshire, and my father wished to return to this area. So he proceeded to purchase a brand new bungalow in Morningside Road, Aberdeen, hence the picture of us all outside our new front door. My father then opened up a business as an antique dealer; this shop nowadays sells Highland wear as the recent photo shows.

My father rejoined the services in 1939 just after the outbreak of war and we as a family moved to a different area of Aberdeen. It was in the Jasmine Terrace area that I spent my teenage years. In those days entertainment was mainly the endless street games we played; rounders, kick the can and so-on. In the 'ball game' we used a tennis ball. We threw the ball up against a wall for the opponent to catch. He in turn threw it back again and so on until one was the winner of that round. The building that we used was convenient as it had three 'bars' marked which were basically the floor levels of the flats, so to be 'underhand' the ball was thrown under the first bar. This had the advantage of the ball coming back much faster compared with a ball thrown above the top bar.

I recently visited the area and it was a strange feeling to stand outside some of these places some 60 years later.

The idea of writing a book on my experiences in the world of Amateur Radio has been with me for some time. It came as a surprise in 2006 to realise that I had been active in the hobby for almost 60 years and it was a minor shock to know that my status was now that of an 'Old Timer'!

It reminded me of those wonderful stories in our world of Amateur Radio where the 'Old Timer' is sitting on the top of a hill somewhere admiring the view, and the inexperienced radio amateur climbs the hill to seek enlightenment about some problem or another. These questions were rarely of a technical nature; my rig has a problem, my dipole antenna doesn't work. No, the problems were usually of an ethical nature. "How come 'Outer Timbuktu' is counted as a DXCC country and 'Inner Swaziland' is not?" The Old Timer knew all the secrets of the world of DXing, that area of the hobby where amateurs are interested in the countries of the world and making contact with them by radio. The 'Old Timer' was always there, pipe clenched firmly between teeth, with his wise insight into all such tricky questions. The newcomer always left the sage fully enlightened about the mysterious world of DXing. Even today, these articles are a delight to read - oh for the wisdom of the Old Timer!

These days, having been actively involved in the hobby for over half a century, I at least know the background to many of these tales and what makes them special. It is amazing what one will do in search of learning as we make long hikes up our personal mountain to reach our personal guru. We usually return to the reality of 'how it is' either happier or sadder, but always wiser.

Don't get me wrong, it would be unreasonable of me to suggest that the word 'guru' applies to my new status as official Old Timer! Nevertheless, it does seem to me these days (when my brain is in gear) that I can discuss and provide an answer to many of these problems. I have written a great deal of Amateur Radio related material (both technical and otherwise) over the years. The answers come of course, from decades of experience and participation in the hobby, one that has given me so much pleasure. Like most hobbies I suspect, this one gives according to the phrase: 'What one puts into the hobby, one gets out'!

However, in my own case, a passionate interest in the world of Amateur Radio did not envelop me immediately in spite of being alerted to the hobby on several occasions.

In my younger years, I had already decided that things electrical were for me. Even in those early days, in keeping with many other households, 'the wireless' was a daily presence in our lives. In those pre-TV days, it provided a focal point for many family activities. We were not necessarily 'glued to it' exactly, but it was important for news and for family entertainment. I have fond memories of listening to favourite weekly programmes in the early evening. Henry Hall's guest night was one – the end of the programme usually meant "Off to bed now!" The occasional moaning may have wheedled a few extra minutes but generally, 'bedtime' it was, and I recall going upstairs happily enough.

In those days the wireless served as a second fireplace – the family gathered around it and participated in the programmes, and one needed only to have an imagination in that 'sound only' environment. We certainly laughed a lot and were able to visualise what was happening as somebody fell into the water or whatever!

Then, of course, there were often risqué jokes or situations beyond my youthful knowledge of the world. That guru might have come in handy occasionally to answer certain tricky questions I had!

I was about 15 when one of my favourite aunts (a widow) gave me a present of a 2-valve wireless set. She had upgraded her wireless and knew of my interest in wires, switches, etc. In giving me the wireless she mentioned that there was a slight problem - it didn't work! "I just know that you'll be able to fix it," she said. Such confidence made me very proud and happy, and this particular wireless set became a thing of beauty to my eyes. Little did she know of the spark of interest she had lit in my mind. I also learned something about myself - there would be no rest until my Aunt's faith in me was proven.

Once I got the wireless home, in order to even make a start I had to find batteries, in fact three in all. I needed a 2V accumulator for the filaments, a 9V bias battery and a 120V

HT battery. I already had a good pair of earphones and a simple aerial (antenna) courtesy of my crystal set activities. In those war-time days in Aberdeen, North East Scotland (and elsewhere, of course) everything, including batteries, was in short supply - and I mean everything!

My pocket money was not exactly generous in those hard times, but several after-school and weekend jobs augmented this. None paid a fortune, but the sum of them all kept me afloat. However, the batteries required a major outlay of cash and lay well beyond my immediate means. This problem was minor compared with my almost complete lack of basic knowledge about the valve and wireless in general. The crystal set phase had been exciting enough, straining to hear my first weak radio reception whilst making minute adjustments to the 'cat's whisker' detector. It's true to say that I gained some knowledge there, but this 2-valve set was in an entirely different league, and it was to galvanise me into trying to understand how the thing worked.

What miracle happened inside this Bakelite box with its two large tuning controls? What on Earth did those two large glowing glass valves do, exactly? I had long ago learned how to change wireless batteries, the bias battery and the HT battery (not necessarily understanding why) and, of course, had changed the filament accumulator endless times; the one that made those magic valves glow in the dark. I knew the cells needed to be re-charged on a regular basis (common knowledge for everyone who owned a wireless) but to get this set working would need much more. It needed more technical knowledge and understanding, and this was something of which I had a strictly limited supply.

My first educated guess (I still had no batteries) was to have the valves checked, as my Aunt had said on giving me the set, "It suddenly stopped working."

In those days almost every wireless repair shop had the means of charging those 2V accumulators and usually also had a 'valve tester'. If I remember correctly, valves were tested at sixpence each. To give you an idea of money in those days of the mid 40's I earned about that amount on one particular Saturday morning job. Sixpence (two and a half pence in today's money) could buy quite a lot!

We had a wireless shop just around the corner, serving the local community. Upon entering the shop, clutching my two valves, I took my first step over the threshold of knowledge. I knew the shop well and had often looked around whilst waiting for a charged battery. I had noticed the use of old OXO Cube tin boxes with various labels and the radios lying around, either on the floor or on the work bench, waiting their turn to be brought back to life. The repaired radios were usually near the door ready for picking up. I knew the owner, Sandy McBride, a craggy-faced Scot, 50-ish, sporting a neat ginger moustache and a twinkle in his eye.

Mr. McBride turned out to be a real gem. He naturally expected to be paid for testing my two valves - business was business after all - but the amount of help and advice he freely gave was amazing. He showed me a bit of test gear magic; a hulking grey steel box with seemingly dozens of sockets, switches, knobs and a huge meter. To my teenage mind it seemed more like the flight deck of Dan Dare's rocket ship than a mere piece of radio test equipment!

"The valve goes in that socket there laddie … aye, that's right, now ye turn this switch to… here… and wait a while. Green for good – orange for doubtful, red – well they're for the bin lad!" I waited whilst the valves heated up to a dull orange glow. We watched the meter creep slowly into the green – the valves were good.

He could see I had an interest and was not just another customer who wanted to have a couple of valves tested, and this was to be the start of a good relationship. From then on, I was no longer just a customer, but was now seen as a keen youngster - someone really interested in wireless – and that put us on a different footing.

I soon had a part time job with Mr. McBride, cleaning up around the place, running errands and testing a big box of valves - I swear he dug those out just to motivate me! The job gave me a means to achieving my goal of fixing the radio. I could have (for free) a used grid bias battery and the loan of a used HT battery once I was ready. I had the promise of the loan of a 2V accumulator (with the stern provision that I 'looked after it', kept it charged and so on). Who says the Scots are canny people? I prefer to think he was just careful!

It took a couple of weeks to earn those items, and I was none the worse for it because the work was to lead me to more rewarding things - namely a source of knowledge. He helped me a lot and he shared a few personal details too - he had one son in the army and his eldest son was at sea. In many ways he was that 'guru' sitting on that hill waiting for me, and often I had an uphill battle to understand the intricacies of this new and fascinating world of radio.

There were several Wireless magazines in those days, when available in spite of wartime paper shortages. Sandy (never to his face by the way, always Mr. McBride!) introduced me to the writings of a certain FJ Camm in one of those UK magazines lightly referred to as Camm's Comics in the trade. He loaned me the magazines, one at a time - each always had to be returned before another was given. From the magazines I started to understand things, and FJ Camm certainly had the gift of making technical things interesting and understandable.

In a moment of generosity (and presumably a very quiet period), Sandy asked me to go home and fetch my wireless set. He would have a look at it and "There would be no charge", he informed me majestically! It only took me a few minutes to run home (yes we used to run and walk pretty well everywhere in those days) and bring the set back to the shop. I had already looked inside the set and now knew the layout of the various key parts. But despite those borrowed batteries, it had remained stubbornly silent. He quickly looked it over and, on handing it back, he asked me to take it home and re-check all the connections once again. I think he had spotted the fault, but like any good teacher, he was keen to have his student find it for himself!

That Sunday I settled down to checking everything carefully once again, and suddenly I spotted that a wire emerging from the bottom of a largish coil was broken. This coil was one of those Litz Wire coils with brass terminals at the bottom – but there was nothing I could do to fix it at home. A few days were to pass until I got the okay from Sandy to bring the set back into the shop. I showed him what I had found and he smiled. "You did well to find that laddie!" Such praise from Sandy was music to my ears.

He showed me how to repair this broken multi-strand wire. He put a drop of lighter fluid on the end and lit it – as the flame burned he pinched the end between his fingers and quickly wiped away the insulation. The wire was then twisted up and tinned and reattached to the coil terminal, and soon the set was back together. He asked me to connect everything up (using his bench batteries), and when I was ready we switched on - and 'Bingo!', it worked! I know that many of you will have had a similar experience, and it really is a magical moment when something comes back to life. I still get this same thrill from repairing things to this day, 60 years later. A few days later, I explained to my Aunt that the set had been fixed. She was delighted, but apparently not surprised. "Och I ken't ye could dee it!" (I knew you could do it) was all that she said.

Over the next few months, Sandy continued to guide me. He made suggestions on what I should read and, in free moments, he would take time to explain some technical point or other. I recall he gave me the project of making a simple multi-meter. It would have been a few months down the track when he first mentioned Amateur Radio – he was an enthusiast as you might have suspected. I knew nothing about this subject. He explained the basics of the hobby, but his station (along with others of course) had been shut down because of war restrictions. He suggested that the following Sunday I should come to his home for tea! High approval indeed! I met his wife and, in due course, he introduced me to the 'shack'.

To my untrained eye it looked a complete mess with mysterious boxes with switches and dials and trailing wires everywhere! Everything was most definitely OFF and no demonstration was possible; to power up that rig would have been considered quite a serious offence in those days. But he showed me some of his QSL cards and his logbook. I enjoyed my visit and I was to return several times in coming months. Why? I have often thought about it. Maybe he saw in me some younger version of himself? Maybe he missed his two sons? Who can say? However, I always enjoyed the visits with him and his wife, but to be honest I had no sense or feeling that Amateur Radio was for me.

The war years dragged on and it intruded into all our lives. Most boys of my age wanted to 'join up' – get into the Army, Royal Air Force or Royal Navy. By the time the war was over, I was 17 and I had already made up my mind that, if possible, it would be the Royal Air Force for me. Home life was not exactly wonderful either, and in retrospect like thousands before me I think I saw this as my 'way forward'. So in early 1946 I joined the RAF and in due course started my training in the world of radio communications - it was still called 'Wireless' in those days. What a curiously old-fashioned word that seems now!

My training was at No 1 Radio School at Cranwell and, in the months of training that followed, I began to 'find my feet'. It was to be here that Amateur Radio tried to entice me once again. RAFARS (Royal Air Force Amateur Radio Society) had an Amateur Radio station G8FC as its HQ. This enabled the society to keep in touch with serving members of the RAF who were also radio amateurs.

In those days the society had many members who were serving in exotic locations around the world. The G8FC station was a good one, well equipped, with various beams and suchlike. A mandatory part of our training was a visit to G8FC to be shown around and to hear a few words of explanation about Amateur Radio. I can remember wondering "Why? What has this got to do with radios in bomber or fighter planes?" Still the bug did not bite.

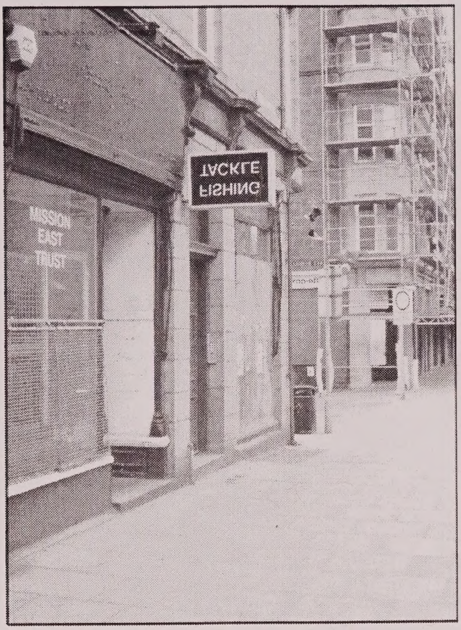
Nine months later at the end of my extensive training, our class dispersed into the real world of the Royal Air Force. Theoretically we were capable of maintaining, servicing and modifying a range of ground and airborne communications equipment. Theoretically! Such faith! But to prove it we proudly carried the SPARKS insignia on the sleeves of our uniforms. Little did I know that within weeks I would be on my way to Singapore. I left 'Old Blighty's Shores', and after just a few weeks of travelling aboard a troopship, I arrived in the exotic Far East for a two and a half years' stay. This was a world away in distance – and a world of difference from my previous life in Aberdeen. It was to change me profoundly.

My mother, father, my sister Margaret and myself, 1930's.

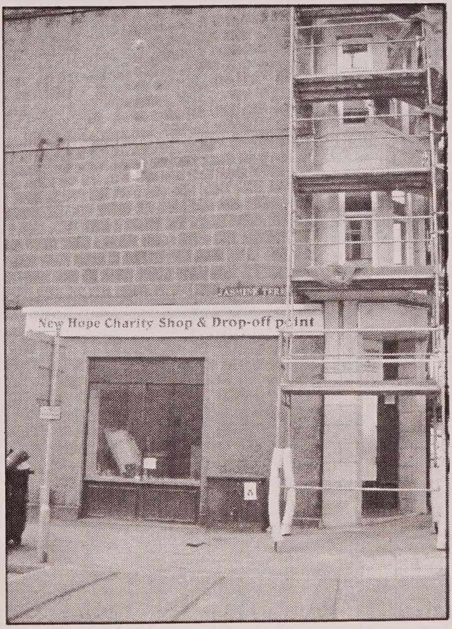
57, Morningside Road some 70 years later.

HOLLYBANK PLACE

My father's old antique shop premises in Hollybank Place.


TACKLE
FISHING
MISSION
EAST
TRUST

Old Wireless shop premises in King Street.


New Hope Charity Shop & Drop-off point

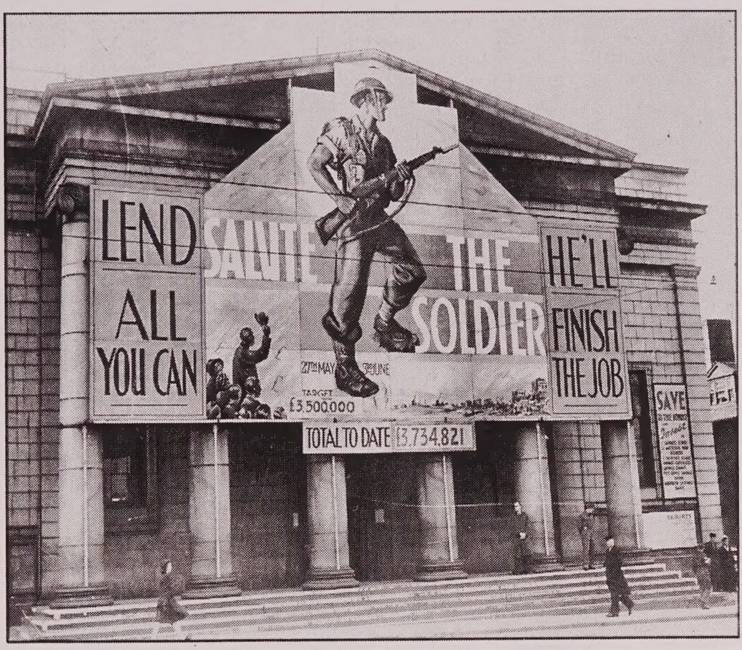
The ball game wall of the 1939/40's.

Early 1940 army conscripts, Bridge of Don barracks.

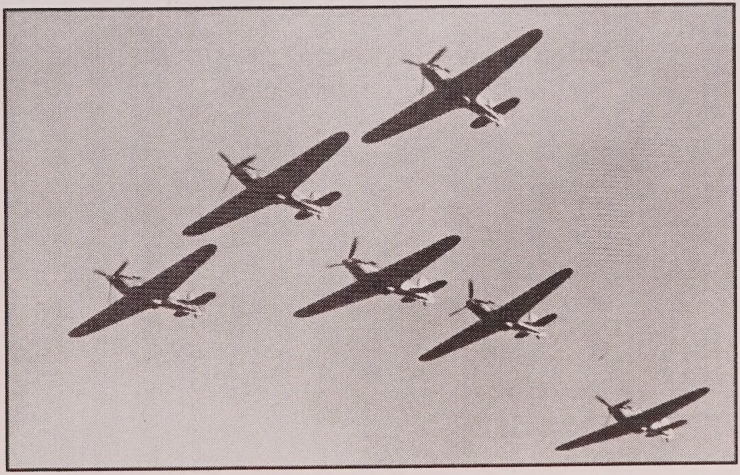
Recovering metal railings from Aberdeen cemetery.

AVIDSON & KAY

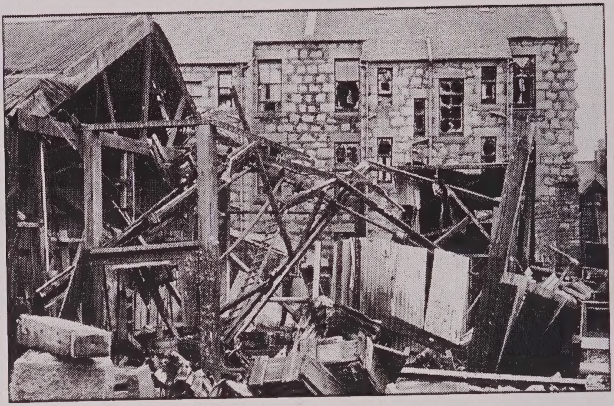
Home Guard march down Union St., Aberdeen. 1940's.


LEND ALL YOU CAN
SALUTE THE SOLDIER
HE'LL FINISH THE JOB
27th MAY 3rd JUNE
TARGET £3,500,000
TOTAL TO DATE £3,734,821
SAVE

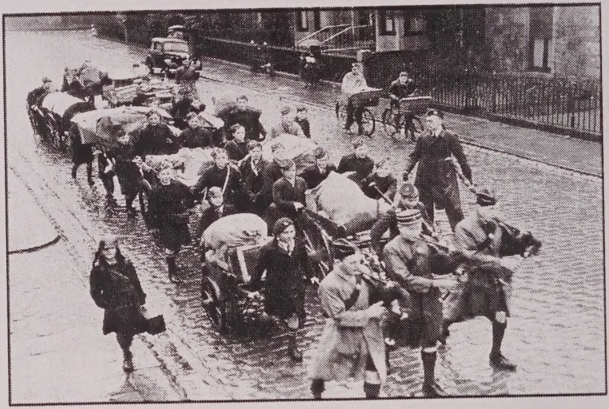
Salute the Soldier, Union Street, Aberdeen. 1940's.



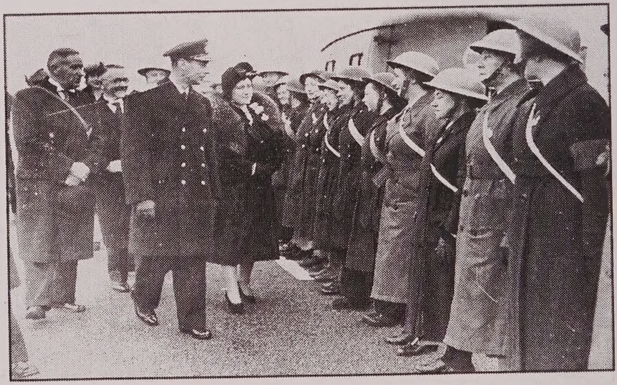
Hurricane fighters, 310 Czech Squadron. 1940's.



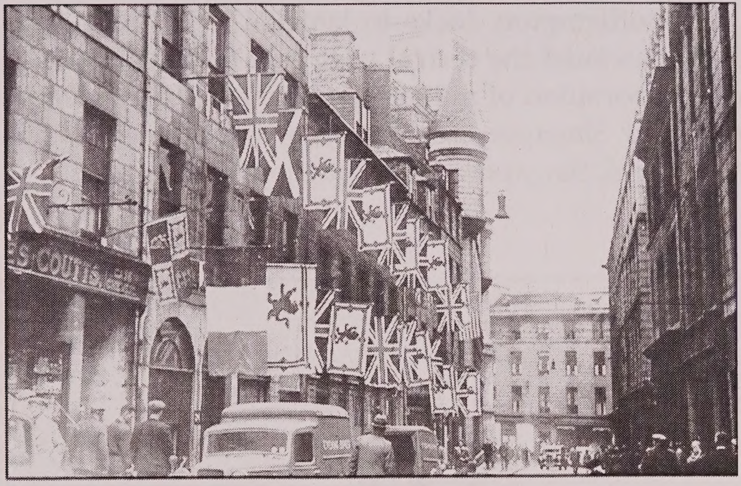
Bomb Damage - Urquhart Road, Aberdeen. 1940's.



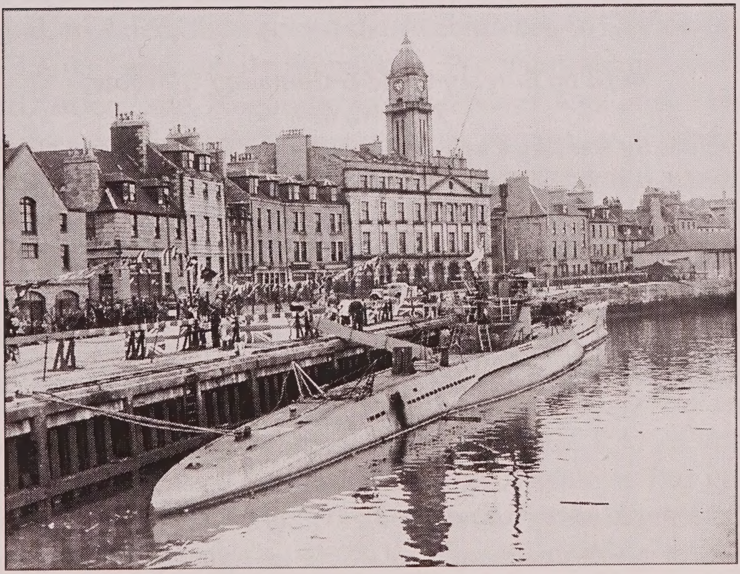
Boy's Brigade collecting salvage, Aberdeen. 1940's.



King George VI and Queen Elizabeth review women warders. 1940.

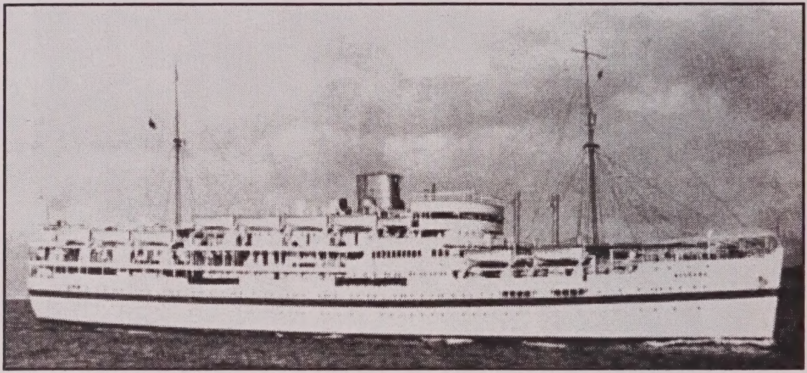


Broad Street, Aberdeen, 1945 Victory celebrations.



Surrendered German U-Boat, Aberdeen docks. 1945.

At Southampton docks in late 1947, the troop ship SS Dilwara awaited the arrival of it next task. This was to be the transportation of military personal to Aden, Negombo, Egypt and Singapore. In my own case, I was bound for RAF Changi, Singapore and a long journey lay ahead.



SS. Dilwara - Launched 1935:

Built by Barclay Curle & Company Glasgow,
Yard No 654.
Engines by Barclay Curle & Co Glasgow/ Doxford Last Name: KUALA LUMPUR Port of Registry: Hong Kong Propulsion: 2 x Diesel
Launched: Thursday, 17 October 1935.
Built: 1936 Ship Type: Troop Ship.
Tonnage: 12598 grt | 7512 nrt | 3435 dwt. Length: 517 feet.
Breadth: 65 feet, Draught: 25 feet
Owner History: British India Steam Nav Co. - China Nav Co Hong Kong.

Status: Arrived for Scrapping - 01/12/1971

Chapter 2

THE FAR EAST

Singapore of the late 1940's and early 50's.

The sea journey by troopship *SS Dilwara* to the Far East took six weeks. The route from the UK, after leaving Southampton, took us through the Bay of Biscay (not for the squeamish) into the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, to Aden, then across the Arabian Sea to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and finally Singapore. We went ashore in Port Said, Aden, and Negombo to stretch our legs and have a much-needed break from the long voyage and confined living. The food was not too bad and we did have access to a shop for various edible goodies and other items.

It was in Negombo (Ceylon) that Amateur Radio made yet another attempt to gain my interest. At the dockside our group was approached by a civilian asking if any of us were interested in the hobby. He had noticed that many of us carried the Sparks insignia on our sleeves. In my own case I was able to mention G8FC and the RAFARS HQ station at Cranwell and also Sandy in Aberdeen, but I also told him that I had no particular interest in Amateur Radio. He gave his callsign as VS7NX (it meant nothing to me at the time although some time later we did in fact have a CW

QSO). I have forgotten his name, but he was a skilled code operator and very active over a period of many years.

On arrival in Singapore, my first posting was to No. 48 Squadron, Transport Command at RAF Changi. The Changi of today is a renowned International Airport. We British (and others of course) were familiar with Changi for a different reason; the infamous Changi jail and the treatment meted out by the Japanese to the POWs interned there during the WWII.

By a strange coincidence, the eldest son (Willie) of my Aunt Polly (it was she who gave me that radio to fix) had been taken a prisoner of war upon the fall of Singapore. Polly had received a notification of 'missing in action' but did not learn until the end of the war that her son had died in captivity several years previously. Eventually I was able to visit my Cousin Willie's grave at the Kranji war cemetery outside Singapore and I remember thinking of Polly and her long years with no knowledge about the fate of her son. In those days the cemetery was very new and, when I revisited the site again some 20 years later, it was still a calm haven of neatly manicured lawns and well tended graves. The war graves commission does a wonderful job on a world wide basis to honour the fallen.

We arrived in the tropics looking like pale ghosts from the UK, and so part of the settling-in procedure was to 'get our knees brown', as the colloquial expression had it. Soon we were all sporting sun-tans and getting used to the tropical heat and humidity. The work routine was very steady. There was much to learn even if we thought that we knew it all! In those days, the current adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!" did not apply. To us, it seemed more like: 'Even if it works perfectly, take it out, strip it down, inspect it, put it back together again – and check to make sure it still works!' We endlessly removed, inspected and checked each and every piece of wireless equipment from the Squadron Dakotas and other types of planes. All aircraft inspections were set in concrete in terms of dates and the type of inspection due. However, all of this was great practice, and soon we realised that our skills and techniques were improving dramatically. As the weeks passed, our competence increased, and practise makes perfect, they say.

Being in the Signals trade brought some benefits. Unlike the air-frame engineers who had to sweat in the scorching tropical sun, wrestling to repair an engine or fix a dented panel, we had the luxury of removing the receivers, transmitters and radio compass units and doing the actual servicing in our radio workshop. We could do our work in the shade, with gently wafting currents of circulating tropical air from the high-tech ceiling fans in the work area. Air-conditioning, I don't think anyone of us knew the meaning of the expression! Is this where warm air comes in via an open window, gets stirred around by ceiling fans, and meanders out another window? That we had!

Although in some cases the plane was already in the nearby hangar, I think the really hard part was the removal of equipment from a plane parked outside. It was often hard, diabolical, and *very* hot work. Often, we had to do this work in the earlier part of the morning when it was cooler. Then, of course, to cheer everyone up – it all had to be put back into the plane, often in the searing heat of the afternoon sun!

The 48 Squadron area (there were several squadrons at Changi) was some distance from the actual living and messing (that means food) area of the main camp. We were transported to and from the squadron lines in large lorries. To prove we had been around a while, we soon learned to call this a '*Gharry*' - a local word for truck, which in the rainy season had tarpaulin covers fitted to keep us slightly dry!

The accommodation buildings were large, white, two or three storey affairs with an open verandah on the two long sides. The inside area with its endless rotating ceiling fans provided accommodation for hundreds of airmen. Each of us had our own personal space, not exactly marked by high brick walls, but each individual knew – "*this* is mine and *that* is yours". The so called 'ablution' area (toilets, showers, washing facilities) was at each end of the floor.

The messing area was in a similar large two-storey building. The ground floor was actually the messing area with rows and rows of tables and bench style seating. The first floor was occupied by the catering staff.

The routine was simple, but almost always accompanied by long and tedious queues - those endless lines! We had all become used to queues in wartime Britain as we had to queue for most things, so it never really bothered me. I had one secret weapon at the breakfast meal. I have always been an early riser, unlike some of my workmates who stayed in bed until the last possible moment. So my morning shower was easy, and there was little or no waiting at the mess hall. Years later, I am still exactly the same, more or less up at the crack of dawn. Incidentally, looking years ahead in my narrative, this is one of the reasons for my success in low band operation! So, I arrived at the mess hall earlier than most, and walked in to be served almost immediately. Now, I use the word 'served' in the loosest possible way. As I walked to the mess in the bright morning Singapore sun, I often day-dreamed – "Would Sir like one or two lumps of sugar in one's tea?" 'One' should be so lucky! The most one got, on a good day, were a few brief words: "Alright mate?" "Yeah, alright and you?" "So-so, mustn't grumble."

After having picked up a tray, (often still wet from the previous wash) you edged towards the line of grim-faced, white-clad servers, with scenes from classic prison films about Alcatraz coming to mind. The routine was to pick up a plate and point to the selected item. In a flash the item in its exact quantity appeared on the plate, you then shuffled along to the next server for a repeat performance, and so on along the line. Portion control was an exact and meticulously followed discipline – no favours to anyone. Imagine this from one of the servers: "Hi, Charlie, I know you love crepe suzette – have a bit more." Riots have started on less of a pretext! So we never expected any favours… and were never disappointed!

Then it was off to find a table to sit down, avoiding eye contact with 'Dan the Knife', 'Mugsy', and 'Al Capone' with the cruel eye of the wardens looking on at all times…! We struggled onto the fixed bench-style seating, sliding in and along, trying to avoid spilling our food. I have forgotten one thing – we all carried our own 'irons' (cutlery to the ignorant!). Probably a very good bad idea in the name of hygiene. Still, there was nothing new to it all – we had been battled-hardened months before during training. No wonder the army had that wonderful folk song with these lines – which started off the longish ditty!

Kiss me goodnight Sergeant Major,
Bring me up a nice hot cup of tea,
Kiss me good night Sergeant Major,
You have been a mother to me.

NB: It would be unwise of me to go on with further verses about being tucked up in little wooden beds! However, I think we could all have used a bit of TLC from time to time – that was most definitely in short supply.

It's all about survival, making do with what life is dishing out, an apt turn of phrase here don't you think? Taking things in one's stride stiff upper lip and all those other horrible clichés. And, of course, we were all on 'easy street' compared with those who saw action just a few years previously.

Each of us became loosely attached to a circle of friends. We didn't have gang names such as 'Smith's Tearaways' or anything like that, but as time moved along we inevitably formed into groups as our common interests connected. Maybe someone you had known on the sea voyage over? Perhaps another who liked football, model airplanes or table-tennis, motor bikes, etc.

One thing is for sure - few wanted to be like Marlene Dietrich who, in her famous line, said; "I want to be alone!" There were a few loners around though, keeping themselves to themselves, as the saying goes.

Apart from work, we also had leisure time. There was recreation, time off, sporting activities and many other things to do if one had a mind to get involved. I was never much of an athletic type, although I could run very well. My passion was table-tennis, and three others in our group felt the same. Fortunately, we had a full sized table in our living area and there was plenty of time to play.

Usually the weekend was free, but all too frequently ruined by a service torture device called the 'Station Parade' held on a Saturday morning. This often became a tedious drawn-out affair for some special occasion or other. An excellent example was the Queen's Birthday where the parade seemed to go on for ever. Still, there was always an honest attempt to get everything finished by midday, or slightly sooner, if at all possible, to allow us all a bit of R&R. It could get very uncomfortable out there, shades of Noel Coward:

Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday day sun,
The Japanese don't care to, the Chinese wouldn't dare to,
Hindus and Argentines sleep firmly from twelve to one

Money was always a problem. Our needs were simple, but Britain was broke – financial cuts are always made from the bottom up. I'm sure there's a law to explain this phenomenon! However, a year or so later there was a complete upwards restructuring of pay and entitlements for all the armed services which made a huge difference.

It was natural for everyone to want to get 'off the camp', if at all possible, and into the bright lights (such as they were in those far off days!) of down town Singapore. There was this wonderful local business called the Changi Bus Company. Its mission was to carry as many airmen as possible at the weekend, to make up for the utter lack of business during the following week, both into and out of the city. I am sure that we queued (that word again) for the bus, but I have no real recollection of ever waiting.

Soon the bus with its eager Malay driver was off on its wild roller-coaster of a ride. Palm trees and native village huts flashed by in a blur. The driver had only one thought in his head - the quicker I can drive this bus into town, the quicker I can get back for another load of those crazy airmen. It was a thrilling journey. The buses were fully 'air conditioned' with the same make and model of air conditioning as our radio service workshops! Even now, I can vividly recall those scenes. Rickshaw-pullers, scrambling to get out of the way of the careering bus, monkeys in the trees, even once, a crocodile in a monsoon ditch. And everywhere the heady scent of the tropics.

We were dropped off in the middle of downtown Singapore where everything was within easy walking distance. You didn't have to walk, of course, as there were endless rickshaws and trishaws plying for this lucrative weekend trade. For the slightly longer distances, this was the way to go. I suppose that during the week things were quieter for those operators also.

Once in town, there were several great service facilities available. A decent meal, usually served with a smile, at very reasonable prices, with perhaps a movie show after. The St. Andrews Club was a favourite, and there was also a NAAFI (Navy Army and Air Force Institutes) both of which had facilities on camp. Our morning and afternoon work breaks had a NAAFI van delivering hot and cold drinks, sandwiches and other edibles.

I enjoyed walking around Singapore; the endless exotic scenes quite unlike home and the fascination of a multinational population. There was always something to see, listen to and try to understand. The population was a mish-mash of people of different races; Indian, Chinese, Malay, European and others. There appeared to be so much to assimilate that it was often mind-boggling.

I must make one point. In those days Singapore was a British Colony but it had fallen to the Japanese in WWII, and post-war changes were afoot. No comparison can be made between the Singapore of today and that of the immediate post-war years. In those days it seemed to me that the different ethnic groups lived in harmony, but I suppose that a few hours in the city every couple of weeks does not give one any real insight.

During other weekends or weekdays we were more likely to walk down to Changi Village to have a look around, as that was considerably closer. In most cases, four or five from our group of about nine would decide to go. There was a large array of shops on either side of the village, for example tailors, food shops, camera shops and shoemakers. These businesses strove to sound 'western' with glorious names such as The Okay Lucky Best British Tailor! Usually, the trip to the village was for a meal, but one could also to pick up a new shirt, get shoes repaired or whatever. Gradually, we were all getting organized with decent civilian clothes – anything to get out of uniform and appear a bit more casual during those trips to Singapore. They also proved we had been around some time, and our knees were well and truly brown!

Back in our barrack-room accommodation area, I soon became aware of another 'signals type' who operated an Amateur Radio station on the ground floor of the adjacent building. He worked within the Changi Signals centre up on the hill in the radio teletype links area. In due course we met and spoke about the hobby of Amateur Radio, but as he operated only CW (Morse) on his mostly home-built rig, once again I was out of my depth. He showed me several QSL cards, many from Europe, including dear old 'Blighty'.

However, because my Morse code knowledge was at a rudimentary, Boy Scout badge level, another chance of becoming interested in the hobby passed me by. Nevertheless, I did learn a little more about the basics of 'ham' radio as he was regularly on the band. We covered licensing, logging and, of course, callsign country prefixes. I discovered that VS1 was the prefix for Singapore, VS2 was for Malaya, G was for England, etc. I lodged an application at the licensing office in town when I learned from him that my trade qualifications exempted me from the Theory examination!

Then came the day that my Signals Officer called my friend Sam and me into his office; two 'postings' were afoot. One of us would be sent to Labuan Island (West Coast Sabah) and the other would end up on Car Nicobar in the Bay of Bengal. He had no preference over who went where and so he suggested that he toss a coin. The winner would have first choice. Sam won the toss and chose Labuan Island and my posting was then to Car Nicobar Island in the Indian Ocean. Once again the direction my life was to take had hung on the toss of a coin!

In those days in the services most of us could get everything we owned into a couple of kit bags. Service postings meant what they said: "Get there immediately - if not sooner!" The next few days had me rushing around 'clearing' RAF Changi like a frenzied bluebottle. Yes, I had a travel order. Yes, I had taken any borrowed library books back. Yes, I wouldn't mind being paid. Yes all my inoculations were in order. Yes, I will have a few more anti-malaria tablets. I have to be honest - there was no real choice in this clearing business. Like many things in the services, it was simply a matter of following the prescribed routine through to its end. Finally I was all ready to go.

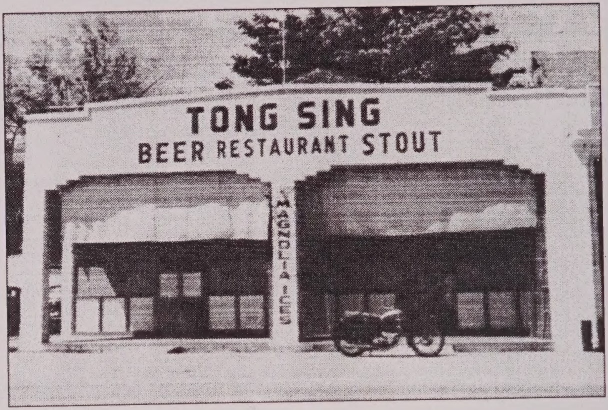
Sorry! I do have to leave RAF Changi now as I am on my way to catch my plane. I will do my best to continue writing whilst on Car Nicobar. But I can't make any promises as I don't know what awaits me there!

RAF Changi Post Office in the late 1940's.

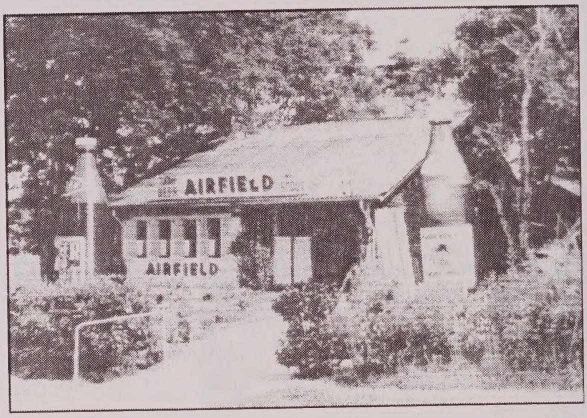
RAF Changi hospital circa 1950.

NA ARTS
GLAMOUR
SILK STORE

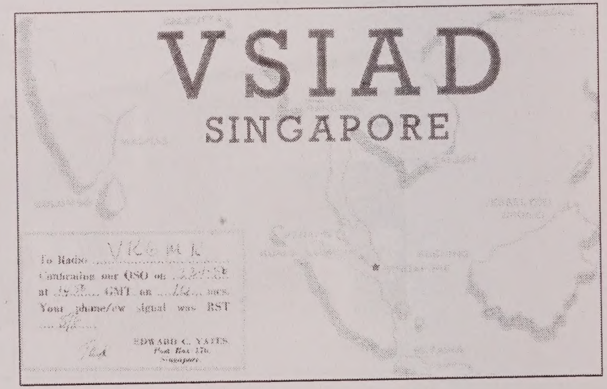
Changi Village stores circa late 1940's.


TONG SING
BEER RESTAURANT STOUT
MAGNOLIA ICES

Tong Sing bar and restaurant, Changi Village. 1940's.


AIRFIELD
AIRFIELD

Airfield Bar at the end of Changi Village. 1940's.



VSIAD
SINGAPORE

To Radio VK6MK
Confirming our QSO on [illegible]
at [illegible] GMT on [illegible] mcs.
Your phone/cw signal was RST [illegible]

Ted
EDWARD C. YATES
Post Box 176
Singapore

I knew Ted Yates in my early days on Singapore.

Chapter 3

CAR NICOBAR ISLAND

RAF Signals Detachment 1948/49

The flight from Singapore to Car Nicobar in an RAF Dakota (what else) had us scheduled to fly from Changi to Butterworth, near Penang Island, and to overnight there. In those days it was a joint RAF and RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) base. The following day we would do the short hop to Car Nicobar, which lay a few hundred miles to the west. On the plane with me was another person *en route* to Car Nicobar, who was to become the medical orderly there.

On arrival at Butterworth, we were met by RAF medical staff who, in keeping their distance, informed us that we were to be quarantined! There had been a reported case of polio in Changi and they were taking no chances. Our two weeks of unexpected isolation was very frustrating. It gave me an idea of what 'being behind bars' meant, but of course we had top-notch treatment by our medical 'jailers'.

After the incubation period for polio had passed and no symptoms had appeared, we were free to proceed on our way. The journey of some 600 miles by Dakota took us over the top of Sumatra's Aceh Province (an international household name as I write, due to the tsunami December 2004) and through to the Nicobar group. Great Nicobar and the other islands make up the group, and our destination, Car Nicobar, lay about ten miles south within the main group. Port Blair and the Andaman Island group lie about two hundred miles further north.

At that time, Car Nicobar was important in a geographical sense for the structure of the British Empire in the Far East. The population of Car Nicobar is a unique group of people. They are quite light-skinned and the men have wonderful physiques, due, in part, to their hours spent strenuously paddling their ingenious canoes in search of fish. Although the islanders had been 'Christianised' many years previously, they remained fiercely independent. The head of their church was based in Port Blair, and both Car Nicobar and Great Nicobar Islands were visited by a bishop every year.

Several hours of bumpy flying later, we saw Car Nicobar lying below us, green and resplendent on a perfect azure sea. I can do no better than Bishop John Richardson's eloquent description: "It is a tiny place – forty-nine square miles of flat earth and only one low hill – a speck on the ocean. But if it is flat, it is still beautiful, with dense groves of coconut palms and breadfruit running down to the water's edge, and the blue waters of the Indian Ocean breaking surf on the coral reef."

We landed shortly after a low-flying pass over the Island. Our first job was to unload the entire plane. There were no baggage handlers in those days! Before we went anywhere, there was one further chore we had to assist with. This was the hand-pump refuelling of the Dakota from 44 gallon (200l) drums of fuel. This was a long and tedious process and, as an aside, we were filling the plane with WWII Japanese aviation spirit, courtesy of the stockpile they had left at the end of the war. If I remember correctly, the Japanese fuel was of a slightly different octane to our UK standard, but the ever-reliable DC3 Pratt and Whitney engines did not seem to mind too much.

During my stay on Nicobar, this refuelling was repeated almost weekly. It became a labour of love. Well, almost. We didn't mind too much. After all, the plane had brought our mail and topped up our food cupboards. Often they brought much needed spare parts - but I am jumping ahead of myself.

Settling in on 'Car Nic' was a completely different experience to my early days in Changi. I was an old hand by now, knew the service ropes, and found day to day life much easier.

My colleagues and I formed a twelve-member Signals Detachment group whose sole purpose was to support the High Power Navigational Aid in the form of a MF Beacon. This beacon was used in the 'staging' of planes flying the Singapore-Ceylon-Singapore leg of Royal Air Force activities in the region. The high activity was due to the return of US 'lend - lease' equipment to the Middle East. I was to be an addition to the current signal staff that maintained the existing equipment and installed new HF transmitting facilities.

All signals traffic between RAF Changi (in Singapore) and Ceylon, and also Changi to Car Nicobar, was carried out on HF CW (Morse code). Our group of twelve 'good men and true' made the working detachment; all had different trades. We had a couple of CW radio operators, the usual cook, motor mechanic and a medical orderly. This strange and exotic environment was to launch me into the world of Amateur Radio. It was on Car Nicobar that the bug was finally to bite, although at first it was more of a gentle nibble, certainly no match for the local mosquito, a merciless, hard-working variety which carried the malaria bug.

Car Nicobar is a quite remarkable island in many ways. Let's face it, at twenty years old my knowledge of the world was very limited, and life at Changi had been quite restricted and safe. Car Nicobar was a completely different world of considerable freedom, yet always within the restraints of service life. I soon came into contact with the local native population, and there was always something to learn, to see and to experience. Work, dare I say it, was a pleasure, not a chore, and the steep learning curve continued. All was not a tropical Shangri-La however. Thinking back on my time spent on Car Nic, I do have a couple of bad memories.

The first episode was when I met our medical orderly in slightly different circumstances from those earlier days in Penang. Mosquitoes were a major hazard on the Island, as they carried Malaria. We swallowed hundreds of tablets of the new anti-malarial drug Mepacrine which had the disconcerting side-effect of turning one's skin yellow! We endured regular spraying sessions of the work and living areas using that magical chemical called DDT. This was a 'rotation' chore and it was my turn to fetch the newly-filled DDT spraying unit and spray our work area. On collecting the hand-pumped spraying unit from the medical orderly, I headed back to our site. I started to pump up the unit to get the right pressure and, as I pulled up the handle, some of the liquid sprayed out of a leaky plunger seal over my chest (during the day we rarely wore shirts). After a few minutes, I had a severe burning sensation and I was in real pain. Our medic had filled the pump tank with concentrated Lye, ready for a disinfecting session, and my chest was soon a mass of nasty blisters. Luckily, there was an outside shower, and I headed there PDQ (Pretty Damn Quick)! That helped, but I was burned quite badly.

The second unpleasant episode happened as a result of a nasty and quite common ear infection known as Singapore Ear. The infection was easily caught by swimming in the sea in the Changi Beach area, and I had already experienced it in a mild form before leaving

Singapore. It was to recur on Car Nic with a vengeance. I collapsed one day at work and remembered very little of what had happened. I woke up a day or so later in the local hospital, and there I stayed for several days until the infection cleared.

In such a small community, one needed an interest and things to do when not working. I often smile when I hear the song 'There is nothing like a Dame.' from *South Pacific*! Of course, we had all the usual amenities of table tennis (my favourite as mentioned earlier), a dartboard and playing cards. I became very interested in photography, as there was a darkroom in one of the tents. Some enterprising soul had even managed to wangle an enlarger for us to use. I learned a great deal about developing and printing during my stay. In the club area, everything was run on a 'chit' system with each item written in a book, together with the cost. The book was balanced each pay day, otherwise no more credit.

The first nibble of the Amateur Radio bug occurred when I became friendly with Fitz, one of our radio operators. I often joined him in his evening traffic shift. I knew no Morse but Fitz was a good teacher and, after a while, I got to grips with the basics of his task of traffic handing. I quickly learned the Morse code, and Fitz, on one memorable evening said. "Right Jim, your turn to send the traffic." I was petrified! But despite my extreme nervousness, I was able to send the short message error-free and duly acknowledged. A simple thing, but I felt an enormous sense of achievement. I remember him as a highly proficient CW operator and he became a very good friend.

Although Fitz was never a radio amateur, it was he who pointed me to the amateur bands as a way of improving my CW skills. The majority of messages we sent were jargon, the five-figure repetitive SYNOP weather groups which was hardly soul-stirring stuff, and Fitz felt I needed some plain language experience. I soon discovered that the Amateur Radio bands had their own peculiar jargon, but at least the received stream of dots and dashes could be translated into meaningful words. In the coming months I became a reasonably proficient CW operator and, incidentally, the magic of Morse has never left me. It is a wonderful way to communicate as it is based on a memory bank (one's brain) and instant recall into ones fingers to the actual Morse key. I find the reception side also intriguing as the same code picked up aurally can be translated in two ways, either by mentally reading the message, or by actually writing down the message. Of course, the latter method is always used when receiving commercial traffic.

Despite the guiding shove by Fitz into the lion's den, the bug of Amateur Radio had still not bitten deeply. Morse was just a new skill learned and another way of passing the free time, like table tennis. But this outlook was soon to change when the plane from Changi brought an additional member to our signals group.

Rex was interested in Amateur Radio, and currently licensed with a 'G' callsign. His friend G3DEX lived down the road from his home in the UK, and they had arranged to keep in touch from Car Nicobar. As far as I can recall, a radio contact was never made between them, but Rex was able to pass along first hand knowledge of the world of Amateur Radio. It intrigued and amazed me that he was trying to contact England, and was using the Morse code to do so! He used the callsign VU4CN from Car Nicobar, in the jargon of the day - with the permission of the Signals Officer. With proper Amateur Radio equipment finally available, courtesy of Rex, I tried my hand. Amateur Radio had stalked me for a long time and was about to move in for the kill!

I squirm now when I think of sending my full six-line address with every QSO but at least it was an exotic address! Then later, using other equipment, I contacted many stations, and felt a thrill with each new contact made. Of course, Car Nic was a much-coveted QSO, and they were a hardy lot, those DXers, as they followed my drifting signal up through the 20 meter Amateur Radio band. I then stopped for a few minutes, retuned the transmitter to the low end of the band and started again.

The months on Car Nicobar passed very quickly and we became a close-knit group, although admittedly with the odd squabble from time to time, which comes whenever a small group of people live 'on top' of one another. However, nothing dramatic happened during my stay. Well, that's not quite true; we did have a fire in the cookhouse one day - very dramatic stuff, but despite some damage, we all survived.

The Nicobarese are a very special people, and even today still function as a highly independent group. Their social structure remains strong and I fondly recall how they treated us with courtesy and affection. Of course, their war years under Japanese occupation (over 7,000 troops) had not been at all pleasant, so I expect we were a welcome blessing in contrast. For our part, I believe we were also friendly and we gave regular film shows (using our 16 mm projector) which were much enjoyed by ourselves and the locals. The plane from Changi brought a regular supply of new films, and these were duly projected by us onto an outside screen made of bed linen. This had the advantage of being viewable from the back and the front! I think the film with the most impact was Talk of the Town – its impact was in the last reel, which was in COLOUR! I can hear the screams of delight of our mostly Nicobarese audience even today. Before the film went back on the next flight I showed it on three more occasions. We seemed to be part of the community and, after the movie shows, often found small gifts of bananas, coconuts and even the occasional chicken left for us.

I have endless fond memories of my stay on the Island

and, in many ways, it started a good habit of how to view people in general, particularly people from other races and cultures. It was an excellent lesson for life, broadening my views. Sadly, after just a 10 months stay, it was time for me to travel back to Singapore. The detachment task I had come to do was finished and I was soon flying back to Changi once again.

Car Nicobar! Some 40 years further down the track…

It was to be many years later that I contacted the Chairman of the Tribal council of Car Nicobar (on three occasions) by telephone from Norfolk Island. In 1995 on my visit to Port Blair, in the Andaman Islands, I had made contact with the department which dealt with Car Nicobar. I was very hopeful of being able to get a visa for a one or two day stay on the island. It was a mere 200 miles or so from Port Blair.

I found the various departments extremely helpful and very interested that I had been on Car Nicobar so many years ago. Alas, they were unable to process everything in time, but suggested that I get in touch with Car Nicobar directly. I was given the telephone number and name of the then Chairman of the Tribal council of Nicobar. In due course, I telephoned and eventually wrote the letter below. Later I was to be informed that my letter had arrived along with photographs, but that the request was not taken any further. I never had written acknowledgement from the council. I suppose the matter was just too difficult to action. The Island is the base for Indian Forces in the Bay of Bengal and remains a very secure area. It would have been very special to able to return to the Island and I was fairly disappointed.

More recently, I felt a great sadness over the recent tsunami events in the Aceh Province (December 2004) area, literally a few miles from the Nicobar Group. This feeling stayed with me for several weeks as it was reported that Car Nicobar had been badly hit. It was a powerful feeling, in a way, after the passage of so many years.

The attached letter is self-explanatory, and I would like to share it with you. Its original format is retained.

The Chairman
Tribal Council of Nicobar
Car Nicobar Island
Andaman and Nicobar
India

J.B. Smith
P.O. Box 90
Norfolk Island
Australia 2899

Attention: The Chairman
Mr. Aberdeen Blair

Subject: Visit to Car Nicobar

Date: 18th June 1997

Dear Sir,

Greetings to you, and the members of the Tribal Council of Car Nicobar, from our small Island in the South Pacific. Such is the world of technology these days that it enabled me to contact your office by telephone the other day. It has been almost fifty years since I was on Car Nicobar Island.

In those days, serving in the Royal Air Force, it was quite an experience to find myself on your Island, in the late 40's. My initial move, after completion of RAF training in the UK, was to be sent to RAF Changi, Singapore. Shortly after my arrival, I was selected to be part of the RAF Signals Detachment to Car Nicobar. These were the days of a major Radio Beacon on the Island (Callsign - CN) a Navigational Aid for the numerous RAF aircraft flying in the region of those days.

Of course, arriving on Car Nicobar to be part of a small group of RAF personnel was quite a 'leap' into the unknown for me. Far from home, young and inexperienced, I must admit to feeling slightly concerned. What would life be like on a small island so far from Singapore? I soon discovered the beauty of your island and the friendliness of the Car Nicobarese people. It seemed that we were accepted even although we were foreigners and in a way intruders on your Island.

The many months spent on Car Nicobar leave me with many happy memories. I have to say in all honesty that I never thought that our paths might cross once again in some far distant future.

Just a short time ago, in 1995, I visited Port Blair for a few days and, at the time, thought that it might be possible to visit Car Nicobar. However, at the time, I was not completely aware of the formalities and it was impossible to take things further at such short notice.

Two weeks ago, I wrote to the office of the Lieutenant Governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in Port Blair, asking whether consideration might be given to the issue of a permit to visit Car Nicobar. After all, almost 50 years is a long time, and just maybe that landmark could provide a strong enough reason for permission to be granted to a foreigner, to once again be a visitor to your Island.

The Secretary of the Lieutenant General in Port Blair gave me information on the Tribal Council of Nicobar. Firstly, for politeness, I contacted the Office of the Deputy Commissioner on Car Nicobar, and they gave details of your office, telephone number etc.

Initially I thought that perhaps your office had some say in the issue of the necessary permit; however this may not be the case.

For old time's sake I enclose a few photographs taken during my stay in 1948/49. Note that they are actually computer images taken by 'scanning' some of my old photographs. Unfortunately, in many cases I no longer have the original negatives.

During my telephone conversation with your office, I had recalled the Andaman's children, which I had met on Car Nicobar. I have enclosed a photograph of the two Andaman (or is it three?) children from Port Blair who accompanied the Rev. John Richardson during a visit to the Island. It was wonderful to hear that one of those children is still alive and resident on Car Nicobar. I have forgotten all their names now.

I will do my best to re-visit Car Nicobar and must await the outcome of my request to Port Blair for permission. It would be really nice to hear from your office. It might just be that some of your (older) people will remember me; it would certainly be nice to hear from them. It must have been strange for some of the youngsters of those days to have us around.

I honestly believe that that we were all happy together with a great deal of mutual respect. At least I trust that is how we will be remembered.

I have lived on Norfolk Island for almost 17 years now and am retired from the world of communications. I am still a British Subject and also hold dual citizenship with an Australian passport.

This letter is being written to your office with a feeling of nostalgia. The processing of these old Nicobar photographs has reminded me once again of so many things; the film shows we used to give, my short stay in hospital on the island when I was very sick, and countless other memories which have re-surfaced after all these years.

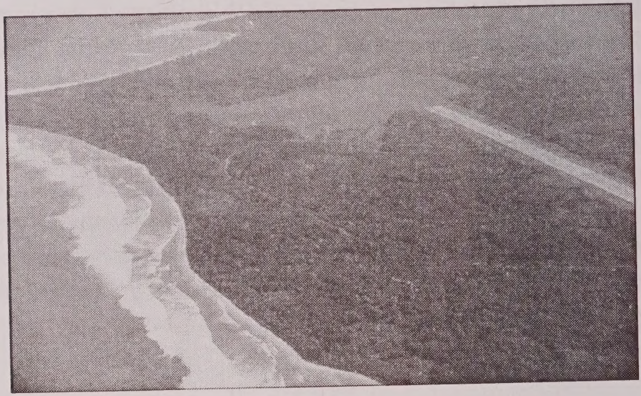
I do hope that permission to visit Car Nicobar will be granted. We shall see. In the meantime, my warm personal regards to you, your fellow council members and fellow Nicobarese from an old friend who remembers your Island and its people with love and affection.

I remain, Sir,

Yours Sincerely

Signed James B. Smith

Celebrating the 22nd Anniversary of India's Independence.

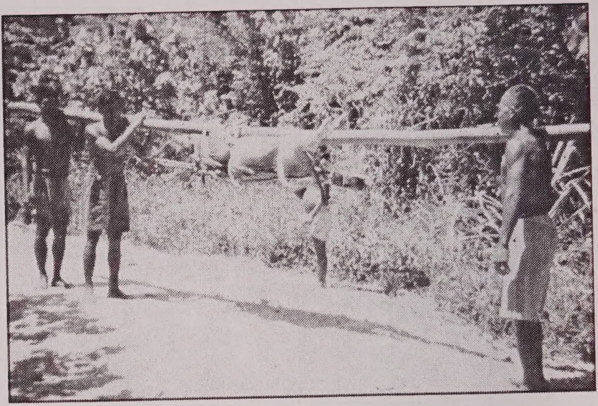


Car Nicobar air strip and detachment camp area. 1948.

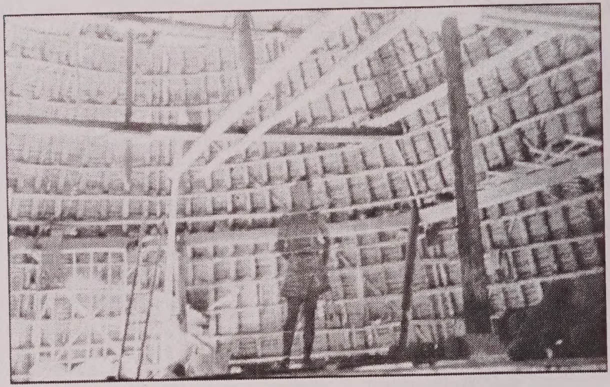
Car Nicobar, 'help' our cookhouse is on fire!

A weekend BBQ and get-together, great food.

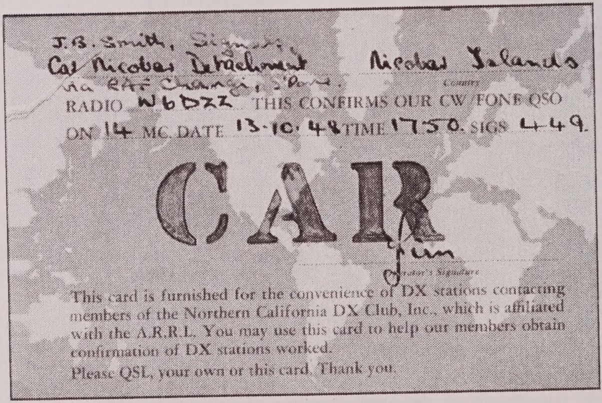
Hooked on store bought tobacco!



Bringing home the bacon – Car Nicobar style.



A double exposure, inside a Car Nicobarese home.



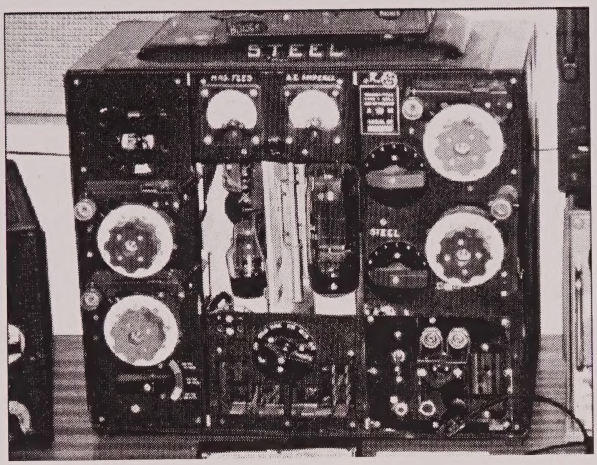
J.B. Smith, Signals,
Car Nicobar Detachment   Nicobar Islands
via RAF Changi, S'pore.   Country
RADIO W6DZZ THIS CONFIRMS OUR CW/FONE QSO
ON 14 MC. DATE 13·10·48 TIME 1750. SIGS 449.

CAR

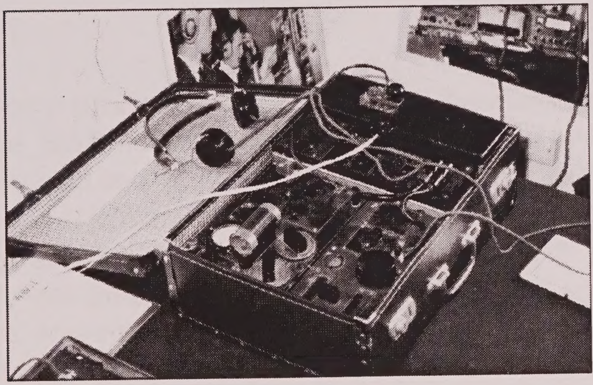
Jim
Operator's Signature

This card is furnished for the convenience of DX stations contacting members of the Northern California DX Club, Inc., which is affiliated with the A.R.R.L. You may use this card to help our members obtain confirmation of DX stations worked.
Please QSL, your own or this card. Thank you.

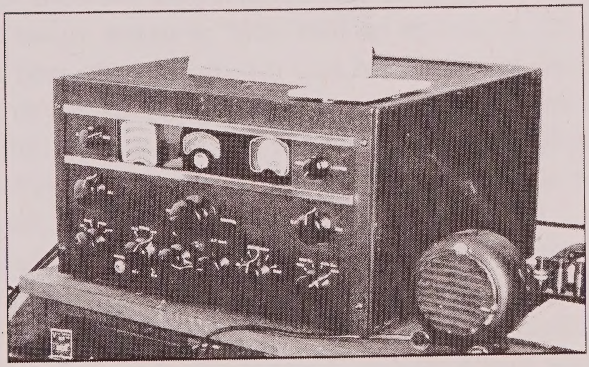
CAR QSL card for a QSO with me in October 1948.



T 1154 – I used on Car Nicobar in the late 40's.



WWII – B2 Suitcase set, TX, RX and Power supply.



RCA AR 88 RX, I used one for my Car Nicobar QSO's.

Chapter 4

RETURN TO SINGAPORE

Using my first Amateur Radio license - VS1BQ

It took some time to settle back into the bustling activity of an active RAF station and, of course, the multitude of people around me, after the relative peace and calm of my stay on Car Nicobar Island. I soon realised that apart from work-life on Car Nic, my life had been pretty easy going and so it was initially hard to reintegrate myself into what, of course, was a more normal service life.

I had been posted back from whence I came, namely to 48 Squadron, Changi, and was in the process of settling back and meeting old friends. I was pleased to discover that the radio amateur was still in the next block and I updated him on my time on Car Nic. He was delighted to hear about my tackling the Morse code and over a couple of days he gave me a quick brush up of the Regulations section. Sneakily, he gave me a quick code test and then announced, "Right you'll do"!

He guided me (or rather pushed me) to the path of completing the formalities of that ham ticket, and I decided to go into town to complete my Amateur Radio license conditions. Before leaving for Car Nic, I had lodged my name and basic information with the downtown licensing authority. My trade qualifications had exempted me from the Radio Theory section,

However, I still had to take the other two parts, the Morse code test and also the Regulations examinations.

The following week Singapore beckoned. I duly arrived in the government office with the mandatory ceiling fans whirling away. The examiner had the day's copy of the Straits Times newspaper on his office desk area and asked me to send the section he had marked. Shortly after, he asked me to copy his sending, (from the same paper) and that was that. The actual Morse examination at 12 wpm was a walkover (Thank you Fitz!). I felt like saying "Hallelujah", because I was very happy about it all?

Later, in the same office, I found no difficulties with the remaining Regulation section and felt that I had done well. About thirty minutes later I was told (rather grandly) that I had passed both sections with my exemption from the Theory Section of the total license being recognised.

A week or so later, my actual license with the previously allocated callsign of VS1BQ was now available for my use. The license allowed me to operate on the usual HF bands with a power level of 25 Watts, crystal controlled, Morse only, and the license was for a one-year probation period. Log keeping was mandatory and, in fact, was one of the requirements for an upgrade (proof of 100 contacts logged correctly) to a full privilege license, hopefully after some 12 months down the track. The joy of it all, a real live Amateur Radio license, lookout ham radio, here I come! Well not quite...

With the necessary permission acquired, (everything in the forces requires permission) the station was set up in the 48 Squadron radio workshop, and I had easy access to the use of a BC 348Q receiver and its power supply. The TX was a crystal-controlled home-brew affair with a 6L6 as the output valve, good for around 25 watts. I opted for a simple Windom Wire antenna which was made of surplus wire from the trailing aerial system used on the Dakota. It was top quality hard drawn material and, even better…it was free. There were many Dakota landings in those days, with the trailing aerial wire still out! OOPS! (I think the radio op had to buy drinks all round in the mess afterwards as penance). In due course I was to make a fair number of contacts with this set up. However, my plans were to be abruptly thwarted for a few weeks.

Since I held dual ground and air equipment qualifications, shortly after my return from leave I was assigned to the 'ground' radio section. This was responsible for all equipment running the actual Air/Ground communications from the Control Tower and for Navigational Aids, etc. My various routines would take me to the Air Traffic Control Tower, VHF and HF sites, etc. Often, it would be fixing a problem or just routine inspection. This would mean my leaving 48 Squadron and entering into a completely different environment from my squadron work before I had been posted to Car Nic.

Now that I was settled in and back in Changi proper, there was one other thing to be done before I assumed my new ground radio duties full time. Under RAF rules and regulations I had to take leave (R and R?) This was mandatory after serving in a remote detachment and I decided to go to the RAF leave facilities on Penang Island in Malaya.

These days it is a hugely popular tourist resort, but in those far off times it was a much quieter and delightful Shangri-La. It was similar to Singapore in some respects, but on a much smaller scale of course. Travel was courtesy of the RAF via a squadron Dakota, (not 48 Squadron) and I remember that the total cost involved was very reasonable.

It was during this leave that I was to meet my future wife Jean. Or more correctly, I had in fact already met her on a couple of occasions, (as I was being shown the ropes of my future assignment) as Jean worked in the Control Tower as a Radio Traffic Operator. Then, by pure chance, we sat side-by-side on the flight up to Penang; she too was going on leave. Side-by-side in those days meant exactly that. The seating in the Dakota meant 'bucket' seats arranged lengthways along each side of the fuselage. The only view to be had was by looking across the fuselage out of the window on the opposite side. The seating was really arranged in the way to enable a fast parachute-jumping exit, which fortunately, we didn't need. We landed safely at RAF Butterworth, then also being shared with the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force).

By the time we arrived on Penang Island, (after a ferry ride from the mainland) Jean and I had managed to talk together despite the row of the plane noise, and during our leave got to know each other better. We had a great time in Penang as a group of us got together. There were plenty of trips into town, trips around the area of the leave centre, long walks and climbs, and wonderful swimming in the tepid waters of the tropics - always a very pleasant pastime. I could not swim a stroke before I came to Singapore. I am sure it was a result of memories of bleak, freezing cold swimming baths of Aberdeen on those occasional compulsory school outings. Brrr!

I have one particular memory in Penang, which in a way was a bit of a show-off thing. Via Amateur Radio, I already knew someone in Penang, namely Kew, VS2BS, whom I had worked a couple of times from Car Nic and from Changi. I had intended to go and say hello, and suggested to Jean that she might like to come along. It was a great idea. We were warmly welcomed in Kew's Malay-style house where we were given a cooling drink, some fruit and general pleasant hospitality. The seating was comfortable Rattan-style furniture, but we soon realised we were being eaten alive! Mosquitoes were one thing, but there was also some bug or other nibbling away at us in the

Rattan seats. By the time we got back to the leave centre, we were both very itchy and scratching as though we had fleas! I think it was good of Jean to forgive me for putting her through that early episode.

Soon it was time to say goodbye to this haven and head back to dear old Changi. Jean, of course, went back to her usual job in the tower. As for myself, I had some hard work ahead and much learning to do as I went over the various sites and diverse equipment. I continued to have permission to use the 48 Squadron radio workshop corner for my Amateur Radio activities, even though I was no longer a part of the squadron.

To get around the various sites, I had my own Signals-style vehicle. This was a strange square-shaped vehicle which I collected and returned on a daily basis to the motor pool. I had a certain amount of independence, which in a way was quite good, as I had become used to it on Car Nic.

As mentioned previously, in the late 40's, and early 50's Singapore was quite an exotic and interesting place, and although Changi was a fair distance from the town centre, there was an excellent bus service. Most of us were regular visitors to town at the weekend and I can still feel the open air ride on those buses even now. It was nothing like the 'Clean and Green' Singapore of today. It was a thriving multi- national city with endless things to do and see. Most of the sights required no financial outlay, and it did have a huge 'surplus' market colloquially known as Thieves Market. It may have been well named as it was said that one could buy a Dakota or even a battleship, with the right contacts and sufficient cash. I for one never doubted this.

Jean and I continued our courting and as a result of my interest in Amateur Radio, she too became interested. We went on a Morse learning course. In helping her, I felt she picked the code up very quickly. I had already purchased a Triumph motorbike; remember my comments on Thieves Market? Well in the bike business there were numerous, war surplus, UK forces bikes around. Those were mainly the AJS, Triumph, Matchless and Lee Enfield machines which were widely used in the service in those days. The bike I chose was the Triumph as I felt it to be the best of four available machines. I had it spray-painted my favourite colour, a lovely dark maroon. Otherwise, it was a bit like Henry Ford – you can have any colour you like so long as it is Khaki! In addition, I changed the front suspension to the 'teledraulic' system, (purloined from a damaged Matchless 350 machine) and felt that I had the bike I wanted. Much more important, I became mobile and it was to make a huge difference.

As an aside, (but still related) one needed a civilian driving license and strangely, these were issued at the same government area as that Amateur Radio license. There was no way out, I had to take a driving test. It was all very well organized. The examiner followed me down to where I had parked my bike. He looked at the machine (my pride and joy) as though he were an expert – noted immediately that the front forks were not Triumph and remarked it seemed a good idea. Finally he said; "well all my men will be in place now so leave the car park, turn left into the traffic, and then turn left again at so and so street, etc." Eventually it seemed that after a run round this fairly large block, I should then return to the car park by exiting the traffic stream. He impressed on me the need for proper traffic signals, and he might have a couple of questions about road safety on my return. The trip took all of ten minutes (there was not the traffic of today's down town Singapore chaos). Soon I was safely parked back in the car park. Then it was back to his office where I was left for 15 minutes or so until he returned to say that he had been talking to his 'men' and that I had passed okay.

I have never really been a doubter – but had he really posted half a dozen guys around my circuit, carefully noting minor flaws in my riding technique and hand signals? Just maybe the answer to that question is no! However, I was soon legal, those L (learner) plates removed and 'in business' as they say. Memory is a funny thing, but even today I still remember that S 1726, the registration number of that first motor-bike,

My requirements in Amateur Radio terms were more mundane and the stocks of ex-military equipment available were enormous. It became easy to find an 'as good as new' National HRO Senior receiver, which of course came with a couple of faults – all the stuff dumped there was suspect! The entire range of coil packs could be collected over several visits to the market, plus a pair of headphones and a decent Morse key. The place was a gold mine. Twenty years later, when I returned to Singapore in 1969/70, Thieves Market was still there. I used the place to fill in many gaps in the requirement of the School of Electronics which I was helping to set up under a contract arrangement with the Singapore government.

With the motor bike, Jean and I got around the Island much more easily. We were also able to do much more, with trips into town being no problem. With the freedom that comes with one's own transport, we could go to other places, off the beaten track, and so become much more aware of all the Island had to offer. The bike was ideal and fairly inexpensive to run, although I simply cannot remember what a gallon of petrol cost back then. There was one disadvantage, namely it could certainly rain in Singapore. If you think you have seen rain, may I quote Al Jolson? "You ain't seen nothing yet!" as the monsoon rain was something to behold and experience. When the heavens opened up one could get very wet, very quickly.

During this period, both Jean and I were coming into contact with the other radio amateurs of Singapore, all with VS1 callsigns, several of whom had been licensed for some time. My general Amateur Radio knowledge widened and I became a member of the Singapore Amateur Radio

Transmitting Society (SARTS). The Society held informal meetings each month and if at all possible, I tried to attend each one. Meanwhile, I now used a bug key and was making many CW QSOs as VS1BQ.

In those days, I used a mandatory crystal-controlled transmitter, and would call CQ for several minutes. I would then indicate that I was listening from my frequency all the way up the band (note these frequencies were very approximate because of the general inability to tune to any exact frequency). I had no bandspread capability of course. The only reason I knew where I was transmitting was because I was crystal-controlled! QSOs tended to be more chatty; in those days the simple '5 and 9' QSO was not done. We gave our callsign regularly as under our regulations we had to identify every over. All contacts had to be logged. At that time, most of my contacts were with British held territories, as the British Empire covered a large area at that time.

In early 1949, motivated by a construction article in a late 1948 ARRL *QST* magazine, I become interested in SSB, then in its infancy in Amateur Radio terms. Within the downtown group I was often asked if I could fix this or that and help with others to get an antenna organised and I felt part of a group. Many of the amateurs were also in the services, based at the various units over the island. Others were civilians, working in business, or in some cases, government positions, many being quite active with substantial stations. That same surplus market could provide a brand new BC 610, (with spares) a choice from several RCA transmitters, or AR 88 receivers, etc. We (the RAF) used them by the bucketful as a standard HF receiver at all communication sites. The receiver had been part of our radio course and I became very experienced with them, both in fault finding and those old detailed inspections routines.

My life also took a further turn as in late 1949 Jean and I were married at St Andrews Church, RAF Changi. Once the basics of settling into our new life were complete, I set up a station in our downtown accommodation. My wife Jean became licensed as VS1YL - she had also become interested in the hobby and she had passed the Morse code examination on the first attempt. It is interesting to note when we returned to Singapore some 20 years or so later, both our VS1BQ and VS1YL callsigns were still registered in the system at Telecommunications and two new current 9V1 calls were issued to us immediately.

It was also at this time that I became a confirmed 'home brewer'. Of course, on thinking about it, there was little choice in those days, as there was little commercial Amateur Radio equipment available. In any case, such equipment was quite beyond my financial means. So it was build the equipment oneself, or go without. Money (or more often, lack of it) carried a new meaning, and I often wondered about the old adage 'two can live as cheaply as one!' We should be so lucky! That collection of radio amateur bits and pieces had been courtesy of part of my Car Nic savings and being a single person.

Being married soon meant that buying lots of radio equipment was really out of the question. We moved to better accommodation near the old Kallang airport and there I set up a station that we could both use. With some help from a very good friend Reg, VS1AG, and the resources of Thieves Alley this station became quite adequate for our use. Gradually, I improved it, although it was still easier to remain on a crystal-controlled basis for transmitting. Using any form of VFO meant having the mandatory need for Frequency Measurement equipment. In those days, something like the old Bendix BC 221 frequency meter was the ideal answer. They were readily available and later I was able to purchase one in reasonable condition at 'The Market' in town. I kept it and used it for many years, well into the 60's. It was a wonderful item of test equipment.

With the arrival of our first child, Bruce (now G3HSR) we once again moved into a slightly larger area in the same house and we all resettled into our routines. An amusing situation occurred once we got back on the air again. Often we had very heavy QRM with the source obviously very close. It happened on an irregular basis. Finally, one evening with the QRM splitting my ears apart, I disconnected the antenna and was still able to tune the CW signal in. I read the Morse and it was, of course, a VS1 station and which had to be very close. The final joke was that he was actually our next-door neighbour. The bottom of our garden area had a thick hibiscus hedge at least eight feet high. It was on a trip up to the roof area for a look around that I spotted a vertical antenna in the next garden so that solved the mystery. This radio amateur was in the army signals and we became good friends. He, too, had often shut down because of QRM from us! He had no high point on his property to be able to look over that adjoining hedge and spot the culprit as I had been able to do.

Reg, VS1AG, became godfather to Bruce. He was a high-ranking member of the government and he continued to ‘look after’ us in many ways. I, in turn, was always able to help Reg out in the more technical matters of fixing this or that at his station. He was a very good friend and I fondly remember him.

We also became very friendly with Ray, VS1CO and his wife. Ray was in the army in the signals area. He was older and had wide HF communications experience. He was also an avid home brewer from whom I was to learn a great deal. We were very similar in that each of us was interested in the new field of Single Sideband and we had entered the world of SSB around the same time. In those far off days it was virtually impossible to have QSOs using this mode, so each of us, using SSB, was the counterpoint of each other. At least we could check each other’s SSB signals that way.

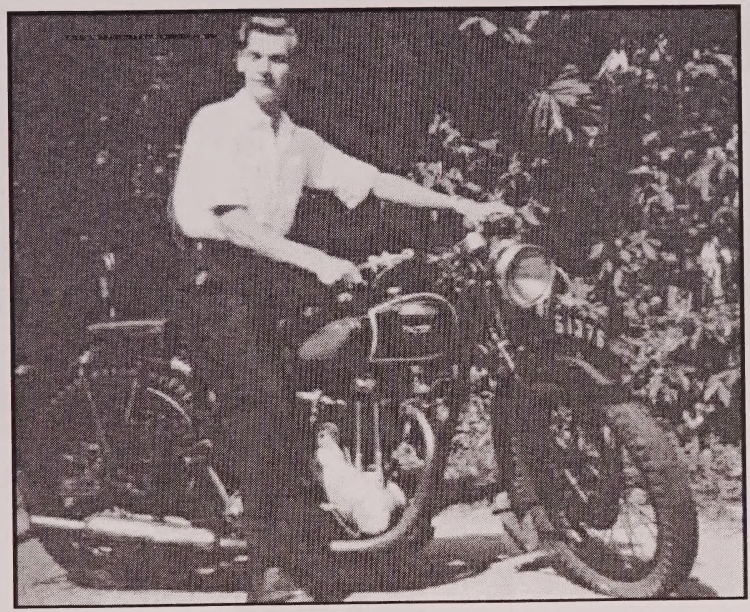
In those early days, one-sided SSB QSOs usually started out whilst in a two-way AM QSO. As I wanted to test my SSB signal, and the other station did not have SSB capability, a routine had to be followed which old-timers will certainly recall. This would involve asking the receiving station to turn his RF gain down, switch the receiver to CW, and then being prepared to tune slowly over the incoming SSB signal. A point would be found where the signal would become readable. It certainly was not easy. In the case of Ray and I, we had the advantage that each of us knew our SSB signal was okay as we often talked to each other using this mode.

In those early days of SSB it was not easy and years of 'them and us' followed - the 'them' stations being the diehard AM stations. The 'us' were those of who were driven by the knowledge that SSB was a highly efficient mode of speech communication, but our transmissions sounded like Donald Duck to 'them'. Often in the years ahead there was direct confrontation on the Amateur Radio bands, as there was certainly strong opposition to the 'new-fangled' mode. How dare an amateur transmit on the amateur bands and we can't understand what is being said!. In fact, it often almost became a shooting war!

However, gradually over the years SSB became an accepted phone mode. The Amateur Radio magazines started to carry home brew articles about SSB, with many of those articles becoming classics in due course. In those days much of Amateur Radio activity was being driven by the huge surplus markets in the UK and in the USA. The use of surplus equipment modified for use in SSB became commonplace. There were pages in the RCA amateur-orientated monthly releases; *GE Ham News* and other ham publications gradually began to lean more towards SSB. This mode was fast becoming 'The new wonder' means of Amateur Radio communication. It took some 50 years for Civil Aviation (e.g. in Papua New Guinea) to start a gradual change-over to its use. These days we all know that the SSB mode has huge benefits and it has certainly proved to be cost effective.

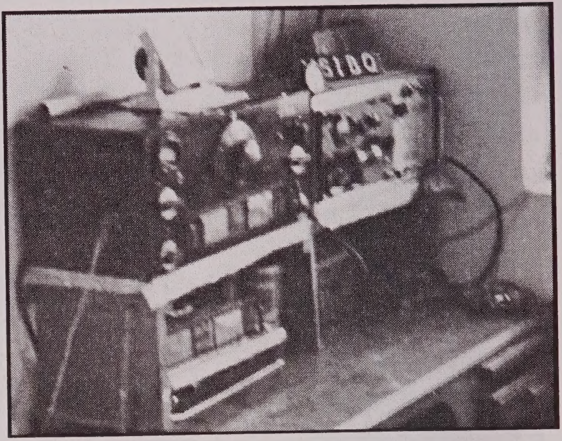
It was with a strong sense of camaraderie that we early home brewing SSBers followed the progress of the mode as yet another country came up on the band in this mode. Those radio contacts were now with both stations using SSB. Gradually, SSB Amateur Radio equipment appeared on the market. Several well-known USA radio companies eventually released equipment to a market keen to make the change-over.

CQ Magazine had the idea of a sort of DXCC Award with the criterion that the country had to be worked using SSB 'both ways.' To make sure, and to make the claim 'legal', the QSL card had to carry the mandatory 2XSSB as the mode of the QSO. We, the SSBers, had come a long way in the Amateur Radio world. I attained a very early *CQ* SSB Award, with I think, if I remember correctly, 113 countries on 2-way SSB.

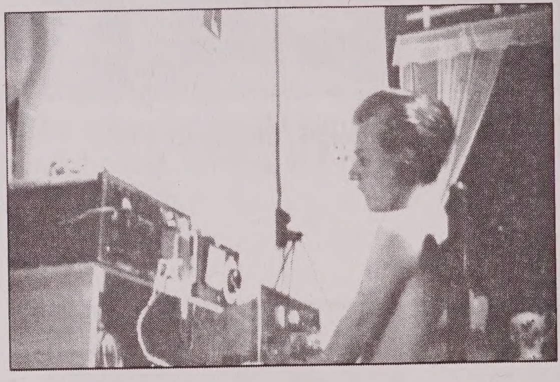


My first motor bike, a 350cc Triumph. Singapore 1950.

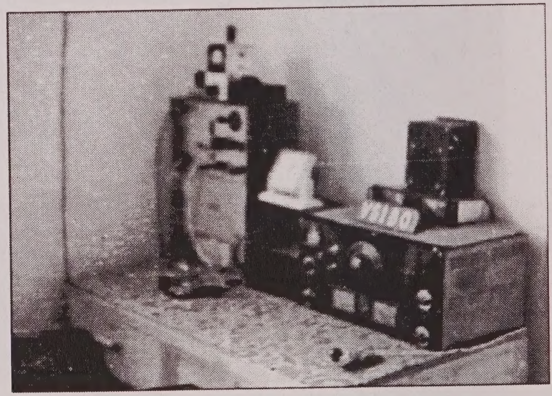
Back view of our first flat in Cairn Hill Road, Singapore.



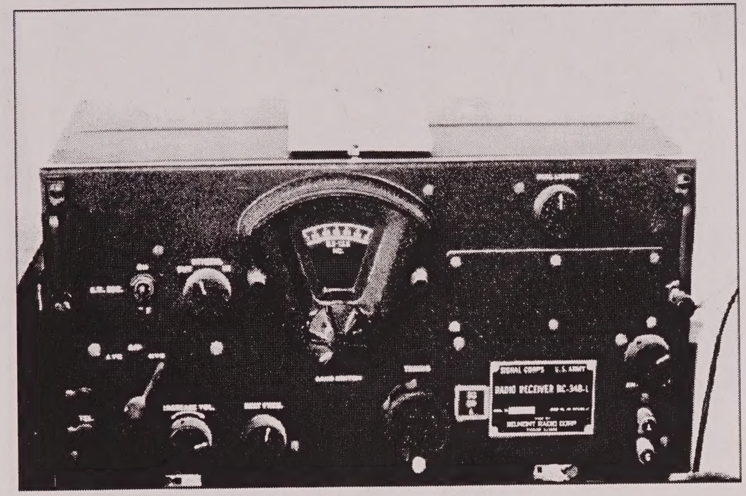
An early VS1BQ station, Cairn Hill Road.



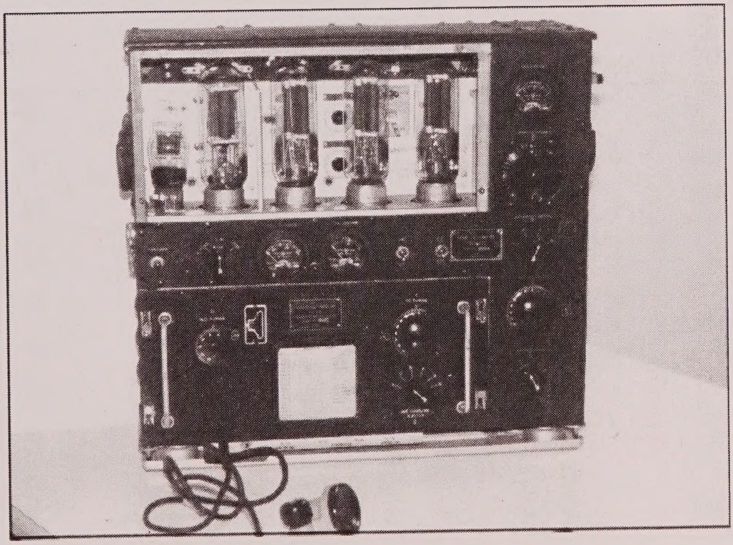
Operating CW, VS1BQ, Cairnhill Road, S'pore.



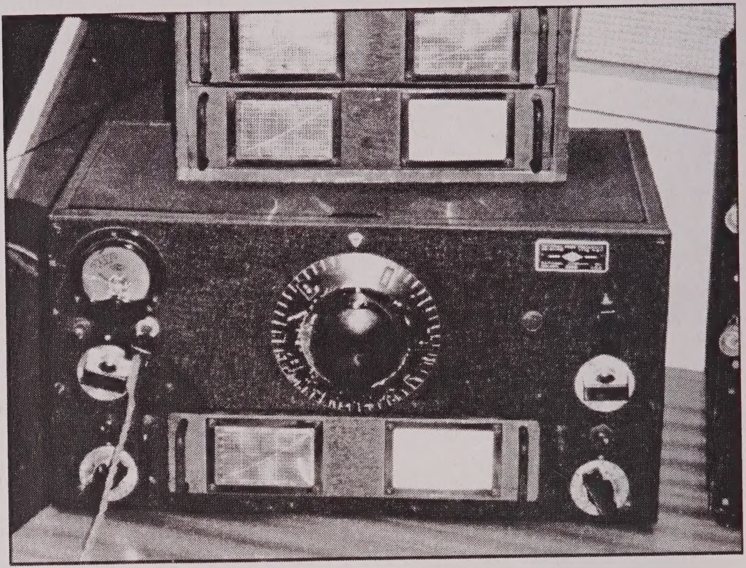
VS1BQ/VS1YL station with HRO Receiver.



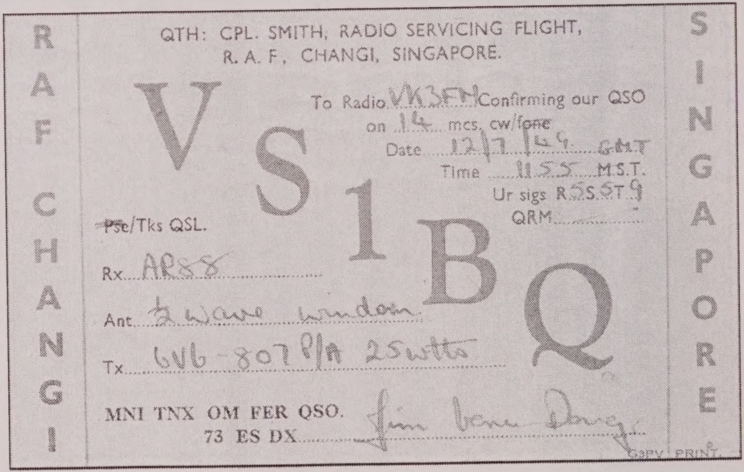
Signal Corps BC 348-I Radio Receiver.



BC 373 Transmitter used in many US military aircraft.



The famous HRO RX complete with multi-band coils.



R A F C H A N G I

QTH: CPL. SMITH, RADIO SERVICING FLIGHT,
R. A. F., CHANGI, SINGAPORE.

VS1BQ

To Radio VK3EM Confirming our QSO
on 14 mcs. cw/~~fone~~
Date 12/7/49 G.M.T
Time 1155 M.S.T.
Ur sigs R5 S5 T9
QRM

~~Pse~~/Tks QSL.

Rx AR88

Ant ½ wave window

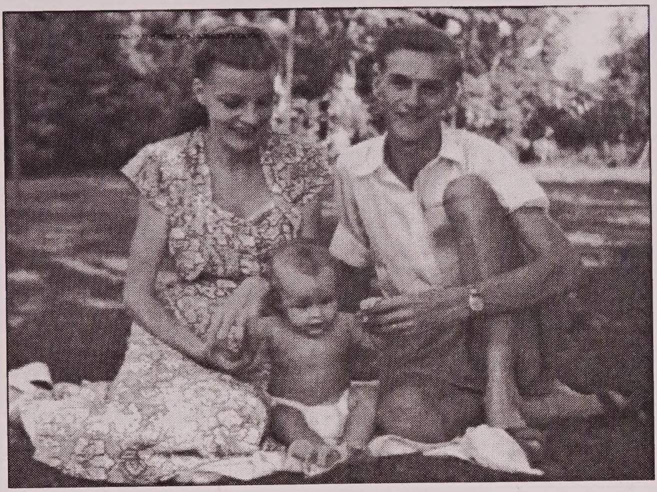
Tx 6V6-807 P/A 25 watts

MNI TNX OM FER QSO.
73 ES DX

G3PY PRINT.

S I N G A P O R E

1949 VS1BQ QSL card, courtesy of the WIA collection.



Jean, VS1YL, Jim, VS1BQ and baby Bruce. S'pore 1950.

DRINKING
WATER

Jean and Bruce, SS Dilwara on route for the UK.

Chapter 5

DONALD DUCK

The Early Days of SSB – British Zone of Germany
DL2TH/DL2YL 1952-1957.

On return to the UK in 1951 at the end of my three and a half year stay in Singapore, accommodation was still in very short supply and so we moved in with Jean's parents in Smethwick, Birmingham. Doing so had also provided an address for the boxes containing all our worldly possessions to be delivered safely from Southampton docks and helped us get resettled once again. The sea voyage from Singapore had taken several weeks and there was much to do in readjusting to real life in England. After a period of repatriation leave, I would have to make my way to my new posting area in the UK.

In the meantime, as well as the dozens of things needing our attention, we applied for our UK Amateur Radio licenses, which became available very quickly. Jean became G3HSQ and I became G3HSR. During my leave I attempted to set up a station. However, it was not all that easy as some of our equipment had not travelled well. In those days, London dockworkers did not exactly have a good reputation for 'careful and loving' handling of cargo. There was much pilfering and, without doubt, several items went missing from our shipment. We claimed, of course, but nothing ever came of our claims and certain items remained 'lost in transit', subject closed. As a result, neither of us was really active in this period as there was much else to do.

I had been posted to RAF Finningly in Yorkshire, still wearing my Ground Radio equipment hat, and soon became involved in ILS (Instrument Landing System) being developed and tested. Finningly was the base for a squadron of very slow Wellington Bombers which made an ideal platform for the various tests of the ILS system. The experience gained there was to stand me in good stead in later years as I tackled TACAN in Saudi Arabia. This was a similar navigational aid with more advanced features.

Housing on RAF Finningly camp was allocated quite promptly so we moved as a family into a rather nice housing unit. Gradually, we set up home and started to settle down. However, there quickly came another move for me, this time to 2nd TAF (Tactical Air Force) in the British Zone of occupied Germany. These were the days when British, US, French and Russian forces controlled different areas of the country. The effects of the Cold War and all its ramifications were everywhere. We were to live very controlled lives during the five years spent in Germany. There was no arguing against the posting, much as we disliked the idea of moving once again.

Soon, after all the usual clearance rigmarole, I was once again on the move, leaving my family at RAF Finningly as I made my way to Germany on my posting. Initially, I went to RAF Celle, near Hannover in the northern part of the country. Being sent to an on-line squadron flying the then famous Vampire Jet plane, I was once again wearing my Air Wireless trade hat. I settled into squadron life quite quickly, and looked forward to using my airborne radio skills once again.

A Squadron is to all intents and purposes a self-contained unit and one is quickly caught up in the day-to-day activities with each person dependent on the others. These were trying times, with squadrons on a continually 'ready' basis because of the political climate of the cold war. A squadron plane was only ready to take to the air after all sorts of requirements had been met. In many ways, being 'signals', our task was fairly straightforward; the plane carried minimal equipment. The routine consisted of a visual check and physical check of the equipment and its connection harness, followed by a radio check with the control tower. This meant that, as the pilot climbed into the cockpit and prepared to take off, everything possible had been done to make the trip safe. Dozens of specific sorties were flown in the course of a week, and we seemed to be forever in the ready state. Sorties were often cancelled – usually due to the weather as the Vampire Jet was a low-flying, rocket-firing plane.

It took some time for Jean and young Bruce to come over to Germany. We thought things were tight in the UK with housing, but in post-war Germany it was even worse. Eventually, they joined me and we became a family unit once again. Among many other things, in due course we applied for Amateur Radio licenses and shortly after, we were issued with DL2 callsigns. Holding a G license made the whole thing very easy; Jean became DL2YL, with the callsign DL2TH issued to me. The DL2 prefix had been allocated for use in the British Zone of Germany. In the same way DL4 was used in the American Zone, etc. It was to be some time before either of us became active, but we were in Germany for a total of five years and it would be fair to say that we were reasonably active during the period of 1952-1957.

I continued with my SSB work, and for a while we were the only stations using SSB in the British Zone. In the US Zone there were a few stations active using commercial Amateur Radio SSB equipment. In the States, SSB equipment was slowly being produced and slowly catching on in the radio amateur world. Many US brand names entered the SSB market and so the range of equipment gradually increased.

In between settling down and creating a suitable home environment for Jean and young Bruce, I was doing my best to resurrect our equipment in order to create a reliable, working station. The mid to late 50s was an interesting time with gradually more countries becoming active in the SSB mode. I can remember some wonderful moments as we made contact with the first SSB station in Yugoslavia and later with other countries.

There were quite a number of DL2 stations active, but we were all spread out over the British Zone and there was little personal contact between us. This was due to difficulties in travelling to another station. In a radio sense, this was almost always due to 'skip' problems between individual stations. In those days, I operated frequently on the lower bands especially 80m. This band enabled fairly easy contact with the UK in the evening and so we both built up a number of contacts in various areas of the UK. In addition our time-zone was roughly the same and in the evening there was also another very good net on 20 meters.

These nets dealt only with SSB matters and all the main participants were using SSB with home-brew equipment. They became a focal point of radio amateurs making their first move into the world of SSB. True, it was easy to become irritated by some members of the net who would freely comment on this or that signal.

However, the nets were also full of so much good information to assist with any problems such as suggestions on what to do to fix a perceived problem with the SSB signal, etc. It was a hive of keen and industrious amateurs trying to help other stations to clean up their signal and get their equipment working correctly. I had been on SSB for quite some time and so as an 'old hand' in this new world, I was welcomed with open arms. My SSB signal was technically excellent and being outside the UK also made us different and rather sought after. They were happy days. Many of the Amateur Radio magazines were now producing interesting material orientated towards the use of SSB.

There was much to motivate the majority of radio amateurs in the sense that actually having to make the equipment was, in a way, taken for granted. It was not easy in those days to consider buying an SSB item made in the US for example. Currency restrictions were in place and it was hard to justify buying commercial equipment. But, as time moved on, equipment gradually became available in the UK. This opened up the SSB field for many Amateur Radio stations to experiment and use the mode.

Eventually there were well over 100 different countries active on SSB. It became a challenge to try and work all these countries, although it should be noted that the ARRL DXCC did not differentiate between an SSB contact and an AM contact. Both were considered to be a speech contact, which, I suppose, was fair enough. But we, the SSBers wanted some sort of special recognition. The US-based *CQ Magazine* had the right idea in creating such an award. *All* contacts had to be made with the SSB mode being used both ways. Now they were talking! Jean and I had early issue numbers for this award which took quite a bit of effort to achieve.

By the time we left Germany in the late 50's, the SSB mode was more or less entrenched in Amateur Radio communications. It proved itself over and over again to be a wonderful method of communication, with several major plus factors. On SSB, it was much easier to switch between Receive and Transmit because of the power levels involved – no speech, no carrier. Older AM equipment was notoriously difficult because one had to switch off the full PA anode current to return to receive mode – the more power being used the harder this became.

With SSB it was therefore easy to have a 'Speak to Transmit' situation - the abbreviated VOX (voice operated switch) control. If you were not actually talking then your station was automatically in receive mode and, of course, vice-versa. I still use this method of station control daily, allowing me to converse with a station very easily. There are none of the needless long 'key down' situations of days gone by.

In due course I was to meet several of the DL2 stations in person. In one of those tricks of fate I was to meet someone who had been very helpful whilst I was on Car Nicobar. This was Harry Pain, G3ATH, then serving in 2nd TAF, being an Air Traffic Controller by profession. I got to know Harry, in the late forties, when he was in Negombo, Ceylon, signing VS7PH. He had made contact with me on Car Nicobar and was very interested in what I was doing there. Over the months he wrote often and helped me to become more acquainted with the real world of Amateur Radio. I received my first Amateur Radio handbook on Car Nicobar, courtesy of Harry.

Anyway, one day after a CQ, I was called by DL2PH and we quickly found out who each of us was in real life. Harry and his wife were to visit us several times and we remained very good friends for many years. It was strange to talk with him face-to-face about my time on Car Nicobar whilst he was serving in Negombo. He told me about his perception of my CW signal; the drifting warbling note, and so on. Harry was himself a wonderful CW operator and he rarely operated on phone.

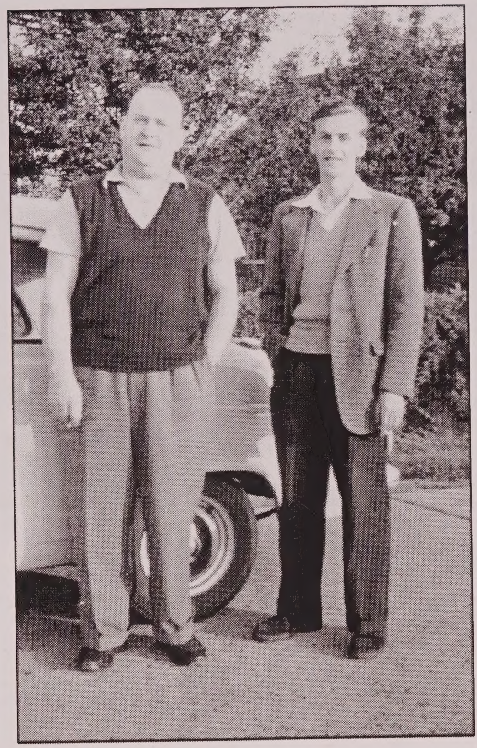
With his passing a few years ago, I felt strongly that I had lost an old friend. I was moved by a wonderful letter from his son to me. I was surprised and touched that Harry had apparently often talked about me over the years. I still have that letter and it is very special.

My interests in the hobby were also edging more towards working DX, although I retained a strong homebrew streak in my activities. My phone contacts continued to be on SSB, with plenty of CW. My German also became very good. At last, as a Scotsman I had something to exercise my Scottish tongue. The guttural German language was heaven-sent for the likes of me.

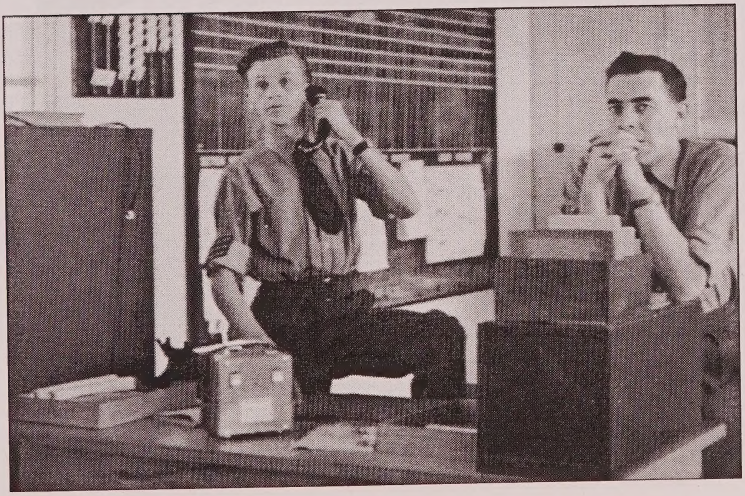
All too soon it was time to leave Germany after some five years in the country. They were special years in many respects. Our family had grown to five with the birth of Stuart and Sheena during this period. We had enjoyed five years of relative stability with time to look after the kids and time to travel around the country to visit cities such as Hannover and Cologne.

Jean and Bruce in Celle, near Hanover, 1952.

My favourite Vampire jet – on line, Celle, winter 1952.



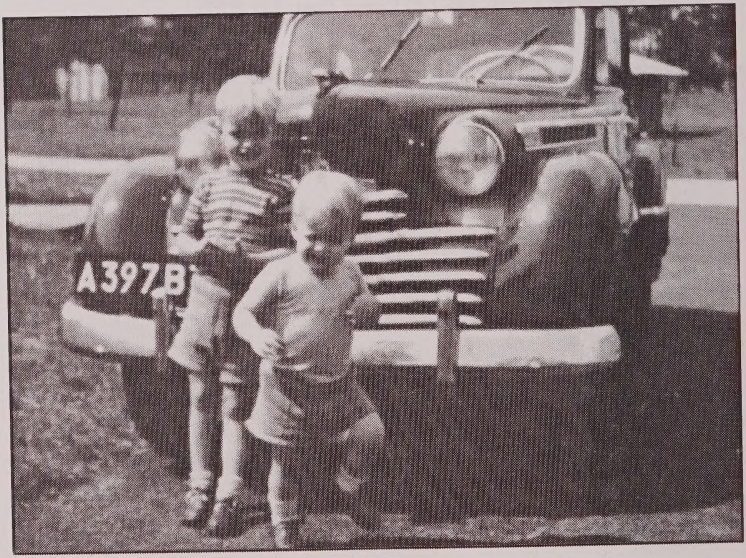
Harry Pain, DL2PH and Jim, DL2TH.



Who? Me? Jim, i/c Wireless and Radar workshop. 1952.

Bruggen: July 1954

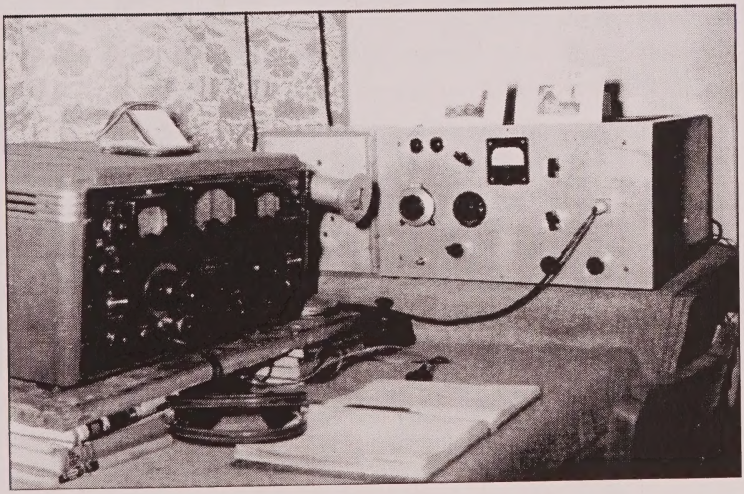
Family gathering in Roermond, Holland. 1954.



Bruce and younger Stuart with family car at Bruggen. 1954.

RAND HOTEL MUSSMANN

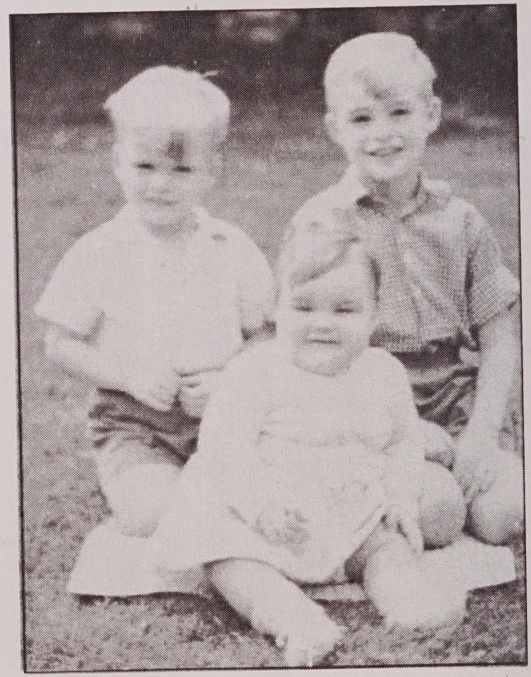
Jim, DL2TH, Hannover. 1955.



DL2TH and DL2YL station, Bruggen, Germany. 1953.

EISKREM
EIS

Jean, Bruce, Stuart and Jean's parents visiting. 1956.



Bruce, Stuart and Sheena Smith in the garden at Stadthagen, Germany. August 1956

Chapter 6

G3HSR 1957 – 1973

Weston Super Mare - The Crescent Years

When my tour of duty in 2nd Tactical Air Force (TAF) was completed we had been in Germany for 5 years. Towards the end of my tour, apart from communications, I had also been involved in Code and Cipher work - this I had found to be very interesting. I had been posted to Number 2 Radio School at RAF Locking near Weston Super Mare, Somerset. This was as a result of being recommended by my Commanding Officer for duties as a radio instructor. In fact, before finally leaving Germany, I had returned to the UK and had completed a stimulating and enjoyable two week 'techniques' course with flying colours.

We arrived at RAF Locking, where I had been allocated housing accommodation. This gave us a stable breathing space and allowed for a more normal family life; for example, my mother came down from Aberdeen on a visit. After my leave period I duly reported literally down the road to start work. This was an ideal period as it certainly gave Jean and me time to think about the future. What would we do in a few months when I was actually discharged?

I started work within the school and was assigned to teach the theory and maintenance of a series of radio equipment which were well known to me. I found that I fitted in easily and enjoyed the work.

My discharge was very close and I had made it clear that I had no intention of staying in the services. As a result of pre-discharge interviews, a recommendation was made that, in essence, I should continue to work at RAF Locking as a civilian radio instructor. I certainly liked the work and so I went to London for a few days to take the Civil Service entrance exam (this was a requirement in addition to my Senior Technician qualification). I also held the Chief Technician qualification but this promotion was tied to 12 years of service; if I had stayed a few more weeks I would have completed the 12 years and received the promotion.

I had no problem with the Civil Service interviews – there was also some sort of written paper but this is a vague memory now. In due course, after returning to RAF Locking, I was informed in writing that I had a Grade 1 pass. Since I had already taken and passed the mandatory teaching course, also with a high mark, it seemed that on discharge I could indeed continue to work at RAF Locking as a civilian.

In many ways, those initial early months at RAF Locking were ideal. Downtown Weston Super Mare was only a couple of miles away. The town was a well known sea-side resort, and certainly had everything one needed; good schools, shopping centre, reasonable bus services, plus of course, the beach and other holiday-style attractions. What exactly did Jean and I want to do, that was the question? Those first few months were untidy, as it took time to really discover what we wanted. We had both really had enough in term of moving around; stability was what we both craved.

In Weston Super Mare, Somerset, we moved into our very first home - one which we could call our own. The kids, Bruce, Stuart and Sheena, went to a local school, literally within walking distance. We were destined to move a couple of times, but still in Weston, and each time to a better property. Our final home was a detached house in The Crescent, Milton in Weston Super Mare. This house provided a term of stability for the now family of six with the addition of one further son in 1960 - Fraser. The Crescent was to provide the launching pad for Bruce, Stuart and Sheena into a University education and then, some years later, for Fraser into his chosen career.

For me, the new found stability carried a price. During those 12 years or so in Weston Super Mare I was to change my place of employment a few times. My work was always of interest to me, never boring. Now, released from those years of the restrictions of the RAF, I did all I could to find my way.

I had been in the teaching profession for some time and I found it very rewarding, much as I loved the soldering iron, components and technical articles, etc. It is immensely satisfying passing on one's knowledge to a hopefully receptive audience. I was teaching the theory, operation and repair of some very sophisticated communications equipment. I enjoyed it immensely, but I had a major problem which seemed to be getting worse - the onset of deafness. I was going deaf in one ear and my hearing in the other was not all that good.

The effect of this was that I lost my directional hearing ability, and this became a huge problem under classroom conditions as one loses one's sense of direction. I had had this problem for some time and it was now becoming very noticeable to me, especially within the classroom environment: who had just asked that question, and then, what was being asked?

I eventually went to see an ear specialist and the news was not good. I was actually astonished at the results of the basic hearing testing technique involving listening to known levels through a range of audio frequencies. 50db of hearing loss, together with audio range restriction, showed immediately the source of my classroom problems. The specialist warned me that I would be almost totally deaf in a matter of years; he also commented that one ear was damaged. He recommended an operation for the worst ear; this would give me 'good' hearing capability. It seemed that those Vampire Jet engines at Celle, Hannover, had done their damage. In due course, he was proved correct; I can still hear with that 'repaired' ear and am more or less deaf in the other. The directional sensing problem still exists.

Shortly after this I left RAF Locking. I had no problems finding employment and I ended up working within the electronic industry for EMI at Wells, some 20 miles away from Weston Super Mare. I ran the inspection department used to check the components and units for the Black Knight project. I have no idea if you, the reader, have heard of this name but it was an important issue in the UK many years ago. It involved rockets which eventually ended up at a test range in Woomera, Australia. I recommended a method of improving the stability of an oscillator string used in the telemetry signals being transmitted during its flight.

I also headed back into Civil Aviation the hard way, with a contract spell in Saudi Arabia at Dhahran International Airport. I became project manager there some time later. However, the severe restrictions (shades of the services) caused me great concern. It was not that I wanted to be running all over the place, partying the night away - not a good idea in Saudi Arabia - but neither did I like the continual check points, the surrender of my passport and other issues. To give you a personal time frame, I heard of the assassination of JFK whilst in the Dhahran Cinema.

As G3HSR, I had heard and worked Hot Ziggity One American Boy (HZ1AB from the US base in Dhahran) many times. This was a club station with a huge signal propagated by rhombic antennas. The main activity was usually beamed towards the USA and so the signal into the UK was just tremendous. I had never imagined that one day I would be working in Saudi Arabia at the Dhahran base. During my stay there I was often a guest operator of the HZ1AB station. It was quite an experience! I was grateful for being allowed to operate, and one of the conditions was that I handled my own QSLing. This I did later on when I returned back to the UK.

My work also had me flying to and from Beirut as this was the only place the company could guarantee a secure telephone line. The calls were always on contract matters; we had to finish this or that project to avoid contract penalties and so on. I liked Beirut as I had had a compulsory stopover of several weeks there on my way out to Saudi Arabia to take up my contract. I had to wait for clearance to enter Saudi Arabia. I did get a chance to look around Beirut and worked at the company office in town.

On returning to the UK, I worked for Plessey, Templecombe, as a contract engineer and it must be said that I enjoyed it very much. Even today I am still in touch with one of my colleagues of those far off days. Just maybe, I was slowly being released from my personal mind-set prison; it takes time to finally shake off the ingrained format and rigidity of the service life. I was becoming myself, enjoying the freedom, the camaraderie within our own project, the "Can do, how to do, will do it, here is a better approach" routine. We all seemed dedicated people and yet complete individuals. It very much suited my personality.

Of course, there was not much time for ham radio in those earlier days; a shack at the bottom of the garden was the best I could manage. I was also involved with the Royal Air Force Amateur Radio Society (RAFARS) and the HQ station of G8FC at nearby Locking. I wonder what strange turn of fate had brought me back within the shadows of G8FC. Last time I saw it all (and rejected it) was in the late 40's, many years previously, at Cranwell Radio School. In those days I had dismissed Amateur Radio; the idea of becoming a radio amateur was not for me!

I personally feel that I put a great deal of work into RAFARS and built the SSB station to put G8FC on the air using this state of the art mode. Eventually, G8FC was to acquire a complete Collins S line TX and RX, plus a 30-L 1 linear amplifier. How tidy it all looked, highly professional, and more to the point, it worked like a dream!

As an aside - again a strange turn of events - I am now a member of the Collins Collectors Association and own several pieces of this wonderful Collins equipment. I am lucky in having the capability to be able to resurrect a KWM-2 or whatever. This skill gives me a wonderful feeling of reward when a unit springs to life for the first time in ages.

At The Crescent, I was able to gradually build up a working station, and of course, I was still orientated towards SSB. I had long ago given up any idea of using AM. As usual, I also remained committed to CW and home brew activities. I was quite active and built several items of Amateur Radio equipment.

Home brew in the 60's was changing as the old war surplus equipment became harder to find. Slowly but surely, US companies, and more importantly for me, UK companies started to produce SSB rigs, and a huge range of components and even complete kits were becoming available. One must not, of course, forget that the Japanese were starting to enter the market as with their YAESU and other equipment.

However, UK currency restrictions meant that it was still hard to buy imported US and Japanese equipment, and in England there was a resurgence of amateurs building their own. Several excellent articles appeared in the RSGB magazine RADCOM, with the well-known and highly respected G2DAF SSB articles a good case in point. My favourite piece if home brew was the building of the GE Ham News articles LWM3 SSB CW rig. This, in effect, was the poor man's Collins KWM-2 transceiver, as it was based on this piece of equipment.

Owning a HF beam at this time started to become more of a reality as companies started to manufacture and sell affordable 2 and 3-element beams. As an example, my first commercial beam was the TA33 Junior using a prop-pitch motor (used in the Dakota DC3) as a rotator.

Like every good ham (with four kids, a dog and a mortgage!), I was continually trying to improve the station by home brewing. I liked very much the G2DAF approach to multi-band receivers oriented specifically to SSB. In the spirit of giving as well as taking, I wrote several articles for RADCOM and other publications.

I was well known within the SSB and the DX world as G3HSR and I have many happy memories of those days. George, G3AWZ, a noted DXer; Tom, GW3AHN; and Geoff Watts that well known SWL listener; and countless other DXers of that period were in contact with me. Geoff ran a wonderful DX bulletin and I was a regular, weekly, contributor to it.

I remember that in a moment of sheer madness (the sunspot cycle minimum was around) Geoff 'invented' his Island of the Air (IOTA) award, an award based on working islands, not countries. I was in touch with him on a weekly basis (DX notes) and duly received an outline of the IOTA award as he envisaged it. I remember writing to Geoff saying, in effect, that it would "Never work" in its present form. I recall writing something like, "There must be thousands and thousands of islands out there!"

His first list of several pages of A4 contained all the well-known islands and needless to say this was followed by endless revisions as amateurs asked for this and that island to be added. Still, many of us 'chased' his list but I was never that enthusiastic. It took a major change, many years later, to create the IOTA Award as we know it today. I wish Geoff (as an old friend) knew that I have now worked 971 islands and that the island total is capped at 1200 islands. He was wonderful person (top of the SWL heap) and I was saddened by his passing all those years ago now.

In the late 60's, on a change of employment, I went to Singapore; not as a teacher, but as an administrator. Jean, Stuart, Sheena and Fraser came with me. Bruce had by now gone to University in Sussex, but during our stay he came to Singapore on a visit. My knowledge now turned to the writing of a ten-part electronics course for the newly created SAFTECH (Singapore Armed Forces Technical Organisation) under the wing of MINDEF (Ministry of Defence). This organisation had been created to cover technical training of personnel of the Singapore Armed Services. Specifically, in my case the School of Electronics was in the course of being set up to train technicians in both radio and radar subjects. In those early days, the school was located in Fort Canning in downtown Singapore, literally a few hundred yards from where Jean and I had had our first accommodation after our marriage.

This was a huge project and initially we were all working against the clock. Even as the first entry was due to start after a few weeks of basic training, I was writing the material for the first section of the electronics course. This routine went on for some time and often we were barely ahead in completing the next section of the course. It some ways, it was a never ending merry-go-round of non-stop work. This was accompanied by endless meetings, until the actual acceptance by SAFTECH of Part 1 as it was being taught in the classroom. At last, some ten months later, the complete course was finally in place. If only we'd had access to computers! But, alas, they were still a few years away. They would have made a huge difference.

The basic course required several changes here and there, improvements to this and that, but it was based on a sound foundation. We then had to run courses with technicians now dealing with actual radio and radar equipment. By this time, additional people were available to help, and they wrote the training material for the mainly Israeli-manufactured, multi-channel radio gear.

Of course, I had staff to assist me; instructors, office assistants and even access to a typing pool. The result was that, after a year, the complete course was 'set in concrete' and SAFTECH had the capability to train technicians on a steady 'revolving door' basis. My title was now Chief Training Officer with an honorary commissioned rank.

I almost forgot to mention the following. There was a shock announcement made at one of 'those' meetings; SAFTECH had decided that the next trainee input would have a number of female students. Women were apparently making a name for themselves in early training as being bright and hard working. At the School of Electronics we were to confirm this; they proved to be wonderful students.

It was quite a moment when, ten months later, after the creation of the technician course, the first product of the School 'passed out'. There were a few who had failed, but they would be recycled into a lower grade. After the usual pomp and ceremony, that first group of trained electronic technicians passed into the SAF as qualified tradesmen. We had not arrived at the point of deciding what we would name the female trainee technicians.

Being in Singapore again was special and it was strange to revisit our first lodging area. Our old Chinese landlady Mrs Sum was still there and we have a wonderful photo of us taken at the front door. The whole area has since been demolished to make way for the ultra-modern Singapore we all know today.

We got out and about a lot as I had a car and there was always something to see. Singapore was creating things like there was no tomorrow. Often, there was no yesterday either as another old cemetery area was reclaimed for some new project or another.

Both Jean and I were active in Amateur Radio. It was a wonderful experience to go down to the licensing area to discover that there, in an old book, my VS1BQ and Jean's VS1YL were still listed where they had been written by the clerk some 20-odd years ago. This time around, I became 9V1PR and Jean retained 9V1YL. I duly bought commercial equipment and we became involved with SARTS again. However, I would say that neither of us was really very active. I still have my old log and some of my old 9V1PR QSL cards somewhere around; also my 9V1PR DXCC cards bundled up securely and resting quietly.

In due course we returned to the UK. Stuart had left us some time previously to prepare for his university entry examinations. Sheena was also getting close to applying for university. Fraser was much younger, so not an educational factor just yet.

Back in the UK in 1970 there was a distinct price to pay for being out of the country for two years. The house required quite a lot of repair and cleaning up after being rented out during our absence. Then, on a personal note, it had taken a few years but our marriage was in serious trouble. Shortly afterwards, Jean and I were divorced. These were hard times for us all, as 23 years of marriage is a long time in any one's language.

I briefly returned to Singapore to tidy up at SAFTECH, and then found myself working once again at Plessey, Templecombe. Whilst there, I went on to purchase my own home; a cottage in Gillingham, Dorset and I gradually moved my bits and pieces into the property. However, the existing Plessey contract soon started to wind down. We had now finished the sea tests of the project; this was a story in itself. We, too, have been dogged by a Russian trawler, armed to the teeth with hi-tech surveillance equipment. They kept a daily eye on us, refusing to budge. As we tackled the more secret parts of our work, a very interesting time was had by all.

I suddenly had a wonderful offer (after a couple of interviews) of employment within my old love, the world of aviation and ground communications. Shortly, I would be heading for Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. My cottage was in very safe hands - it was being rented to my sister. This was to be a short, sharp, sweet leap into a known area. Much more to the point, I could pay off my cottage mortgage very easily!

Meantime, Bruce, Physics PhD; Stuart, BA Electronics; and Sheena, BA, Arts had all finished their education. Fraser, being much younger, was studying for his GCSE. Bruce had passed the RAE examination and held a G4 callsign for a short period of time. A few months later, I relinquished my G3HSR callsign in order that he might have it.

More recently, under the new licensing regulations, he was able to apply for Jean's old callsign, G3HSQ since his mother Jean had passed away. So I think it very special that both of our G callsigns are still around.

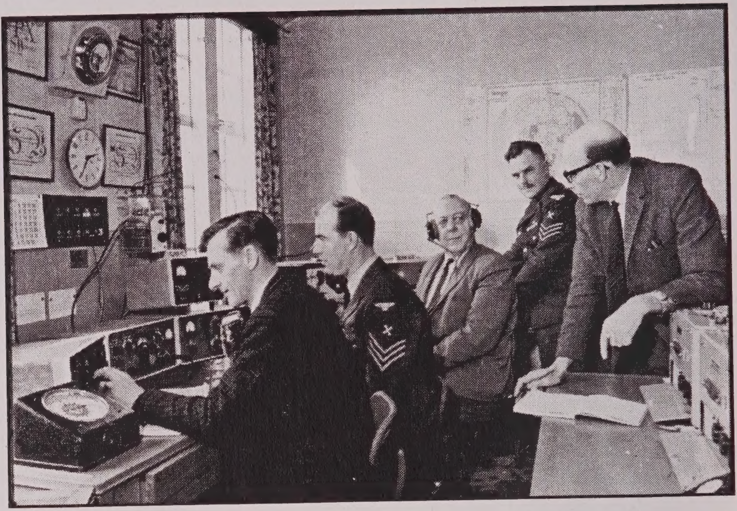
This chapter has been both easy and difficult to write. It covers a period of my life which affected me (and family) deeply. Another 30 years down the track, the feelings are still there. Luckily I remain in touch with all my children on a regular basis. Bruce and Stuart have visited Kirsti and me here on Norfolk Island several times and I go back to the UK on a regular basis. Bruce and I have even had several QSOs over the years; funny how things work out at times. I feel a sense of pride that we are still all together, at least within.

2004 picture of 11, The Crescent our home for 12 years.

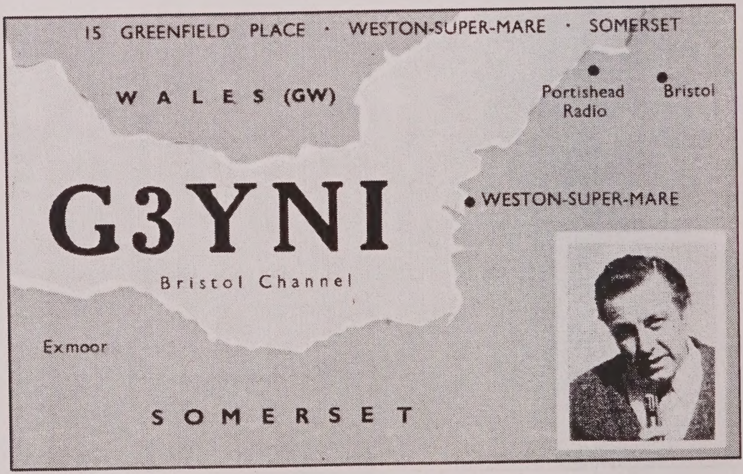
Another view (circa 2004) of 11 The Crescent.

Shopping area very close to 11 The Crescent. Very handy!

Our local 'to of the road' pub, the Windsor Castle.



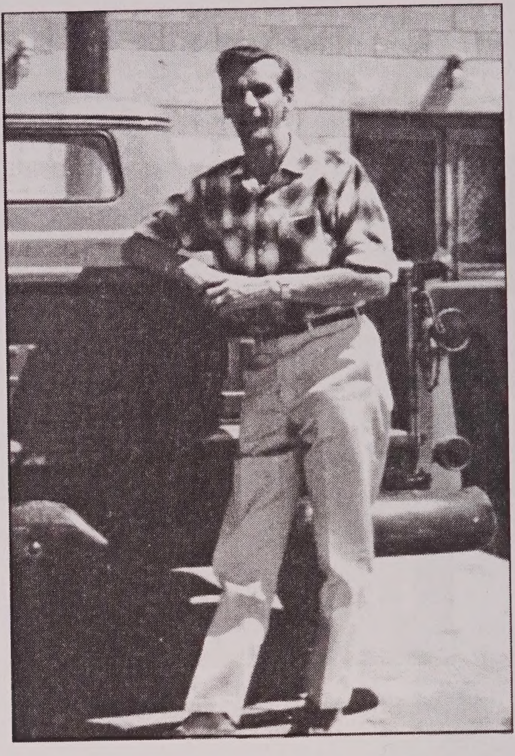
Yours truly operating the G8FC Collins S Line station.


15 GREENFIELD PLACE · WESTON-SUPER-MARE · SOMERSET
WALES (GW)
Portishead Radio
Bristol
G3YNI
WESTON-SUPER-MARE
Bristol Channel
Exmoor
SOMERSET

Alan Bailley, G3YNI (SK), an old and valued friend.

Stuart, Sheena, Bruce and Jean, G3HSQ.

The Smith family taken in Birmingham around 1963.



Jim, Westrex International, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Sheena with Diggy, a stray Collie she adopted in 1968.

Chapter 7

ANNOUNCING THE DX CENTURY CLUB

ARRL *QST* September 1937

I wrote an article many years ago on the start of the DXCC programme which many of us know so well. This may be a good time to introduce this Amateur Radio related subject, as there will be many more references to DXing and DXpeditioning within the coming pages of this book. Looking back in time; at the US ARRL HQ things were afoot in the name of DXing. 'Read all about it!' (This is a famous London, street newspaper seller cry.)

Whilst browsing through some old ARRL *QST* Magazines the other day, in the September 1937 issue I came across the following header in Operating News, page 59 announcing: "The DX Century Club." It had been many years since I had read the *QST* article and, as far as I know, this was the first news of this ARRL Promotion. A club specifically orientated towards those radio amateurs who could submit proof of having communicated with other radio amateurs in 100 countries of the world. The Award would be an attractive DX Century Club Certificate with name and callsign of the station concerned.

However, this time my immediate reaction was to think: "Little did they know what they had started."

The rules for the DXCC award seemed to be quite straightforward. An operator had to submit satisfactory proof of communications with 100 or more different countries. There was to be the issue of an 'Attractive Certificate of Membership in the ARRL DX Century Club.' It was further planned to list (in *QST* Operating News) each month the callsigns of amateurs submitting proof of reaching 75 countries. Then one could update this country total until the magic 100 countries was reached.

The beauty of this award was certainly its international outlook; anyone could apply. All one had to do was to bundle up the country QSL cards and mail them to ARRL Communications Department in Newington, CT, USA. There the actual QSL cards would be checked and an official country total recognised. By including sufficient postage one guaranteed the safe return of the QSL cards. It was the intention of ARRL to list the callsigns and country totals on a monthly basis.

The basic rules were very simple;

1. All contacts must be with stations in the authorised amateur bands using amateur calls.
2. All stations contacted must be 'Land Stations.' Contacts with ships cannot be counted.
3. All stations must be contacted from the same call area, where such areas exist, or from the same country in cases where there are no call areas.
4. The ARRL list of countries will be used in determining what constitutes a 'country.'
4A. In cases of countries no longer in existence, credit will be allowed for these if they were recognised as a separate country by ARRL at the time of the contact.
5. Confirmations must be submitted for all countries claimed: requests that DX contest and other contest logs be examined for confirmation will not be granted.
6. Contacts may be made over any period of years, and may be made any number of years ago, provided only that all contacts be made from the same call area (or country, where

no call areas exist) and the same station license; contact may be made under different call letters in the same are (or country), if the licensee for all was the same..
7. The Century Club award and a QST Listing for confirmed contacts with 75 or more countries is available to all active amateurs, everywhere in the world.
8. Following the first listing of any station in QST, confirmations from additional countries may be submitted as received and the original listing will be changed in subsequent lists.
9. Stations reaching the 100 confirmations mark will automatically be enrolled in the DX CENTURY CLUB.
10. Covered the sufficient postage comments made earlier.
11. Covered applications and where to send confirmations and so on.

So this was where ARRL DX Century Club (DXCC) started. It was stressed that the ARRL 'QST List' would be the only official list of those radio amateurs who had the requisite confirmed contacts from within list of ARRL qualifying countries. Every real 'DX man' (as they were first known) will want to be included. How true!

To the 'First of the Many' - with apologies to the 'First of the Few'.

In the October 1937 issue of *QST* there was the first ever listing of DX men. Incredibly, all had 100 or more country totals:

Frank Lucas	W8CRA, checked in with	112
Douglas H. Borden	W1BUX, with	105
Jefferson Borden IV	W1TW/WICMX, with	104
Henry Y. Sasaki	W6CXW, with	101
H.A. Maxwell Whyte	G6WY, with	100

H.A. Maxwell Whyte, G6WY, had apparently misunderstood things. In his first submission he had only sent 100 confirmations instead of the total 114 he actually had. Yet there were four other DX men checking in with more than just 100 countries. This would never do at all!

So it was that G6WY's next salvo corrected things and he then headed the listing in the December 1937 issue of *QST*. This DXCC listing now looked like this:

H.A. Maxwell Whyte	G6WY	114
Frank Lucas	W8CRA	112
John Hunter	G2ZQ	106
Jefferson Borden	W1TW/W1CMX	105
Douglas H. Borden	WIBUX	101
Clark C. Rodiman	W1SZ	101

In addition, some 16 DX men waited in the shadows until the day that they, too, would become members of this elite DXCC group. There were 9 USA, 1 VE and 1 G station who had claimed confirmations with 75 or over countries:

W1SZ	92	W1TS	89	W2GTZ	88
W2GW	88	W9KA	84	W1DUK	79
W8KKG	78	G2DZ	78	W3BES	77
W9ADN	76	VE2EEE	75		

Already there was now a total of 22 Century Club DXers in the world of Amateur Radio.

So the stage was set as they waited patiently for 1938 to arrive and so continue the struggle. The top DX men with their 100-plus countries were already wearing that new title among radio amateurs: 'Member of the DX Century Club'.

Even at this early stage, difficulties were being experienced by many in getting a suitable confirmation of a contact that would satisfy ARRL DXCC criteria. One solution to this problem was the acceptance of certified log entries of stations operating in international Amateur Radio contests.

The Official DXCC Country List

The formation of the official Countries List had taken several years to become a reality. Questions were being asked by the DXing radio amateurs, e.g., “are Tasmania and Australia separate countries?” A start was made to try and produce the definitive Countries List.

Suddenly, there were several hundred areas, all apparently with a claim being put forward as a country for DXCC. No that would never do, as ‘they’ knew there were ‘no more than 150 countries active.’

However, Murphy’s Law said that if those 150 countries were listed, then some inconsiderate radio amateur would start operating from some ‘other country’. The list would then require another change, and nothing would ever be settled. The problem of how to keep the ‘official’ country list up to date was looming large. It became almost impossible to make a ‘final’ country list that would remain valid for longer than a couple of months. It is interesting to note that our old friend ‘Eric W. Trebilcock of Moonta, South Australia’ assisted in suggesting countries for the list. Eric was in due course to become a legend in his time as a Short Wave Listener.

The logistics were also becoming formidable. To publish a list would occupy several valuable pages of *QST*. Fears were also expressed about the effects of heavy wear and tear of the particular *QST* issue carrying the Country List. (Judging by some of my ‘dog-eared’ DXCC lists over the years, they were certainly thinking straight.). In 1937, an attempt to rationalise the country list into something manageable resulted in 150 countries being listed. More importantly, after much head scratching, a giant leap forward occurred. In future, the ARRL itself would decide what constituted a country for its DXCC award.

The ARRL said, *'The basic rule is simple and direct'*. Each discrete geographical or political entity is considered to be a 'country'. Subject closed, straightforward? Don't you believe it! Hence the next ARRL update;

> *"Problems may occur with Alaska and the USA as they are separate because of geographic division, just as Mexico and the USA are separate due to political boundary. Tasmania and Australia are separate because of geographical division. Scotland and England are individual countries, as are the two Irelands. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are each separate."*

There were many others in the same category. The next line in the rulings pointed to further difficulties;

> *"Some distinction will have to be made between islands and island groups."*

However, major problems were not envisaged and the general rule of a group of islands under one political control counting as one country was applied.

Individual named islands were apparently not a problem and, already Bounty Island, Trinidad and Ascension, etc., were regarded as separate countries.

There were a few little niggles on the horizon though. One radio amateur in the W4 call area asked; "Why don't I get separate credit for working all of the VK call areas?" Another asked, "How come I can only claim one country for the USA credit, when I've worked all US call areas?" "Some of these US areas are very hard to contact!", cried a European DX man.

From there it was suggested, by some, that the total score would be the number of districts worked in each country and adding it up to some grand total. Mind boggling complexity, as to create new countries one would only have to change the district criteria slightly to have yet another entity.

So, after what must have been a lot of acrimony and, of course, endless discussion on the Amateur Radio bands, the jump to the 'one country equals one point' system gradually became accepted reality.

By late 1937, it was fairly safe for the DX man to use the so called 'countries list' which had been published in the January 1937 issue of QST. It makes interesting reading as many of the countries listed are still around today, almost 70 years later as this is being written. Many are obvious countries, e.g. the USA, England, Australia, New Zealand, France, and Germany, etc. However, many of the colony-type countries are now independent, and the prefixes for those are now different.

This is the official List of Countries listed (IARU Section) in the January 1937 issue of QST. It certainly made a very good starting point for that first DXCC award programme.

Abyssinia (see Ethiopia) ……	
Aden……………………………	
Aegean Islands………………..	
Afghanistan……………………	YA
Alaska…………………………..	K7
Aldabra Island………………..	
Algeria…………………………..	FA
Andaman Islands……………	
Andorra………………………	
Anglo-Egyptian Sudan………..	ST
Angola…………………………	CR8
Arabia (see Saudi Arabia)……	
Argentina………………………	LU
Ascension Island……………...	ZD8
Australia………………………	VK
Austria …………………………	OE
Azores Islands………………	CT2
Bahama Islands………………….	VP7
Bahrain Islands………………. .	VS8
Balearic Islands…………………	EA6
Baluchistan……………………	
Barbados………………………	VP6
Belgian Congo…………………	
Belgium………………………	ON
Bermuda Islands………………	VP9
Bhutan…………………………..	
Bismarck Archipelago…………	
Bolivia…………………………	
Ceylon…………………………..	VS7
Chile………………………………..	CE
China…………………………….	XU
Chosen (Korea)……………….…	J8
Christmas Island……………….	ZC3
Cocos Islands…………………..	ZC2
Colombia………………………..	HJ
Comoro Islands………………	
Cook Islands……………........	ZK1
Corsica………………………...	
Costa Rica………………………..	TI
Crete…………………………..	
Cuba………………………..	CM-CO
Curacao and Netherlands West Indies……………..…………	PJ
Cyprus……………………...	ZC4
Czechoslovakia……………...….	OK
Danzig……………………..…..	YM
Denmark………………………	OZ
Dominican Republic……………	HI
Eastern Island………………..	
Ecuador…………………………	HC
Egypt……………………………...	SU
Eritrea…………………………	
Estonia……………………… ..	ES
Ethiopia (Abyssinia)……….…	ET
Faeroes, The……………………	OY
Falkland Islands……………….	VP8

Borneo, Netherlands	PK5
Brazil	PY
British Cameroons, see Nigeria	
British Honduras	VP1
British North Borneo	VS4
Brunei	
Bulgaria	LZ
Burma	
Cameroons, French	FE8
Canada	VE
Canal Zone	
Canary Islands	EA8
Cape Verde Islands	CR4
Caroline Islands	
Celebes and Moluccas Is.	PK6
Goa	
Gold Coast (and British Togoland)	ZD4
Gough Island	
Great Britain	G
Greece	SV
Greenland	OX
Guadeloupe	FG8
Guam	K6
Guatemala	TG
Guinea British ,	VP3
Guinea, Neth. (Surinam)	PZ
Guinea, French and Inini	FY8
Guinea, Portuguese	CR5
Guinea, Spanish	
Haiti	HH
Hawaiian Islands	K6
Hejaz	HZ
Honduras	HR
Hong Kong	VS6
Hungary	HA
Iceland	TF
Ifni	
India	VU
Inini, see Guinea France	
Iran (Persia)	EP
Iraq	YI
Ireland, Northern	GI
Irish Free State	EI
Italy	I
Jamaica and Cayman Islands	VP5
Japan	J
Java	PK
Kenya	VQ4
Kerguelen Islands	
Korea, see Chosen	
Laccadive	
Latvia	YL
Leeward Islands	VP2
Liberia	EL
Fanning Island	VR3
Federated Malay States	VS2
Fiji Islands	VR2
Finland	OH
Formosa (see Taiwan)	
France	F
Fr. Cameroons (see Cameroons)	
French Equatorial Africa	FQ8
French Indochina	FI8
French Oceania	FO8
French West Africa	FF8
Galapagos Islands	
Gambia	ZD3
Germany	D
Gibraltar	ZB2
Gilbert and Ellice and Ocean Island	VR1
Martinique	FM
Mauritius	VQ8
Mesopotamia, see Iraq	
Mexico	XE
Midway Island	K6
Miquelon and St Pierre Islands,	FP8
Monaco	
Mongolia	
Morocco, French	CN
Morocco, Spanish	EA9
Mozambique	CR7
Nepal	
Netherlands	PA
Netherlands West Indies, see Curacao	
New Caledonia	FK8
Newfoundland and Labrador	VO
New Guinea, Neth.	PK6
New Guinea, Territory of	VK9
New Hebrides, British	YJ
New Hebrides, French	FU8
New Zealand	ZL
Nicaragua	YN
Nicobar Islands	
Nigeria (British Cameroons)	ZD2
Niue	ZK2
Non-Federated Malay States	VS3
North Borneo, see British North Borneo	
Norway	LA
Nyasaland	ZD6
Ocean Island, see Gilbert and Ellice Islands	
Oman	
Palau (Pelew) Islands	
Palestine	ZC6
Panama	HP
Papua Territory	VK4

Libya	
Liechtenstein	
Lithuania	LY
Luxembourg	LX
Macau	CR9
Madagascar	FB8
Madeira Islands	CT3
Maldive Islands	VS9
Malta	ZB2
Manchukuo	
Marianas Island	
Marshall Islands	
Rhodesia, Northern	VQ2
Rhodesia, Southern	ZE
Rio de Oro	
Romania	YR
St. Helena	ZD7
Salvador	YS
Sardinia	
Samoa, U.S.	K6
Samoa, Western	ZM
Sandwich Islands	
Sarawak	VS5
Saudi Arabia	
Seychelles	VQ9
Siam	HS
Sierra Leone	ZD1
Socotra	
Solomon Islands	VR4
Somaliland, British	VQ6
FrenchSomalia and,	FL8
Somaliland, Italian	
South Georgia	VP8
South Orkney Islands	VP8
South Shetland Islands	VP8
South Africa	
Southwest Africa, see Union of	
Soviet Union	U
European States	U1-7
Asiatic States	U 8-9-0
Spain	EA
Spitzbergen, see Svalbard	
Straits Settlements	VS1
Sumatra	PK4
Surinam, see Guinea, Nether lands	
Svalbard, (Spitzbergen)	
Sweden	SM
Paraguay	ZP
Persia, see Iran	
Switzerland	HB
Syria	
Peru	OA
Philippine Islands	KA
Phoenix Islands	
Pitcairn Island	VR6
Poland	SP
Portugal	CT
Portuguese India, see Goa	
Principe & Sao Tome Islands	
Puerto Rica and Virgin Islands	K4
Reunion Island	FR8
Taiwan (Formosa)	J9
Tanganyika Territory	VQ3
Tangier Zone	
Tannu Tuva	
Tasmania	VK7
Tibet	
Timor, Portuguese	CR10
Togoland, British, see Gold Coast.	
Togoland, French	FD8
Tokelau (Union) Islands	
Tonga (Friendly) Islands	VR5
Transjordan	ZC1
Trinidad and Tobago	VP4
Tristan de Cunha	ZU9
Tunisia	FT4
Turkey	TA
Uganda	VQ5
Union Islands, see Tokelau	
Union of South Africa	ZS-ZT-ZU
United States	W (N)
Uruguay	CX
Venezuela	YV
Virgin Islands, see Puerto Rico	
Wake Island	K6
Windward Islands (Grenada)	VP2
Wrangel Island	
Yemen	
Yugoslavia	YT-YU
Zanzibar	VK1

DXCC Countries

There are many Amateur Radio orientated awards around and many have stood the test of time. In late 2007, just a year away as I write this, the ARRL of DXCC award will be 70 years old. It is a long time by any standard, and in my almost 60 years of Amateur Radio, this DXCC award has always been part of my Amateur Radio life.

The original DXCC rules have changed a great deal during this time. Far from having a problem of that old question, what constitutes a country?, we have moved into an era where we don't know where to stop! The country total that we chase as DXers (a more modern name than DX men), both male and female these days, is more than twice that original country total in 1937. There are some formidable confirmed country totals around for those older DXing radio amateurs who have stayed put, having lived their life in Britain, Germany or wherever. It is a daunting task to start DXCC over and over again from scratch, after the latest company move to a new country.

I could never beat that rule – *all radio contacts must be made from the same location* (or words to that effect). So every move I have made resulted in my having to start DXCC once again. It has been hard; I have often wished that 50 years ago, 'they' had thought about the idea of a unique operator identity. That way there would be no need for me (and others in the same boat) to 'chase' and claim a QSO with Burma, Bouvet Island, Yemen all over again.

I digress. There have been endless diversions (is this the main factor which makes DXCC so special?) of challenging the rules. How about ships tied against wharves, did they count? There have been many highly questionable activities by the sea-faring radio amateur. Many such jetty bound operations have been disallowed by the ARRL DXCC. In some cases the vessels have been actually at sea during contacts from some supposedly rare area.

There were numerous other gray areas over the years and it became important to really try and stop any further disputes.

Note in those early rules that already the word country is in inverted commas! The DXCC award has never really been about countries (as such) but rather areas thus designated by using certain ground rules. I am just as happy chasing reefs, little enclaves in some land or another, or whatever is on the list at the time. The important criterion is that all DXers are doing the same, following a coherent set of guidelines.

The noting of difference between current and deleted countries was good thinking on behalf of DXCC. It meant that the DXer never really lost that previous DXCC credit for a deleted country. The usual DXCC roll call at any DX dinner or other such DX gathering means that one is allowed to give one's actual total of countries worked, as distinct from the DXCC countries currently valid. Simple examples of deleted countries are those which perhaps had colony status. On being granted self rule (or whatever) a new callsign prefix was issued, and all had to chase it as a new country.

Apart from downright dishonesty, and it takes the experts to deal with fraud, sending the actual QSL card is still the basic proof that one has a valid and bone-fide claim. QSL cards are still the ultimate proof of the QSO, otherwise what is the point of them?

However, in recent years ARRL DXCC has made several dramatic changes to its award programme. A gloriously high-tech computer system, virtually tamper proof, has set up a system that DXers are confident with.

In another dramatic change DXCC now allows others to check QSL cards for the DXCC award. These are authorised radio amateurs and it enables QSL cards to be checked, by such authorised amateurs, at the local DX Hamvention and so on. One always had a sinking feeling as DXCC cards were parcelled up and sent to ARRL HQ, DXCC desk for checking.

As we can know from the DXCC rules, contacts may be made over any period of years with the proviso that all contacts be made from the same call area (or country where no call area exists) and by the same station licensee: contacts may have been made under different call letters in the same area (or country), if the licensee was the same.

The license holder clause has stood the test of time as there have been thousands of re-issued callsigns over the years. Many years ago I relinquished my G callsign to my son (with the agreement of the authorities of course). My son Bruce, now has my old G3HSR callsign, but naturally he cannot have my DXCC country total; he must do it all again by himself. Ditto, for other stations using those re-issued callsigns. Fun isn't it?

Whilst I re-read these old QST magazine words, I had this strange feeling that they were not written some 69 years ago; that it had all happened very recently in our immediate past.

Can the DXers, all these years later, say that it was a bit easier in those days? It was the start of a great award, with marvellous forethought when the basic idea was put together. These early applicants must have had to work very hard for their countries. I cannot judge, but the equipment used looks very primitive by the standards of today, that current 'US$7,500 transceiver' for example.

If only 'they' they had added the following simple words to their basic DXCC release; 'A maximum of 100 countries is all that is required for DXCC, no further claims to increase totals will be considered.' That would have been that. No Honor Roll, no chasing that elusive 300th country. No more thinking "only one more country to work to complete the DXCC list". That said, the ARRL DXCC Certificate is still one of the most popular achievement awards in Amateur Radio today.

Finally

Initially, looking at that country list, one does notice that dozens of Amateur Radio prefixes remain the same today. It is obvious that the ITU country (i.e. real ones!) prefix system was on a solid footing. Of course, in recent years we have seen dozens of changes to prefixes, as one area after another becomes an independent country. Changes have also been made for political reasons.

In that 1937 country list, for example:

ESTONIA	was	ES
LITHUANIA	was	LY
PALESTINE	was	ZC6
USSR stations	were	U1–7 in European areas.
" "	were	U8–9-0 in Asiatic areas.

Libya did not have a prefix, neither did Andorra, Burma, Monaco or Mongolia, to name a few of the more obvious countries. However, Albania was there 6th on the list and today still has the same old prefix of ZA. Was there an amateur active from Albania in 1937?

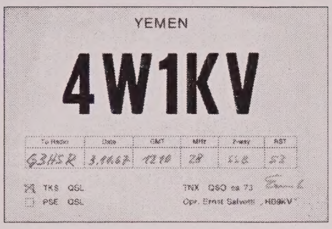
The facts are the DXCC system has been based on fairly solid ground. Most of the amateur handbooks, etc. feature a list of International Prefix Allocations. There are rarely operating exceptions to them, and usually a quick check will reveal just where that strange station is located.

In writing this I have remembered my chase for FQ, FF, FO, for the ZDI, ZD2 and for the VQI, VQ2 and so on. In my world of DXing, I have missed very few countries since my Amateur Radio start in the late 40's. These days I only need one QSO with North Korea on CW to have everything on CW and Phone.

Today there are so many of those old countries that are no more, for example that VK4 in Papua Territory, or the lost KT1, Tangier Zone. The magic of working AC4, Tibet, which in 1937 did not even have a prefix; that was to come in later years. My own, much more recent, involvement in Bhutan; in 1937 there was no prefix allocation for this country.

The year 1937 was early days for me at the ripe old age of nine. I still had to grow up and had to face the war years as a teenager. My interest in the hobby of Amateur Radio came in late 1947. It took me so long to be 'bitten by the bug' as they say, and the hobby has so much good in it. In the company of a fellow DXer, one is never short of a common interest to talk about.

Who says Amateur Radio is dull and without challenge?



YEMEN

4W1KV

To Radio	Date	GMT	MHz	2-way	RST
G3HSR	3.11.67	1210	28	SSB	52

☒ TKS QSL

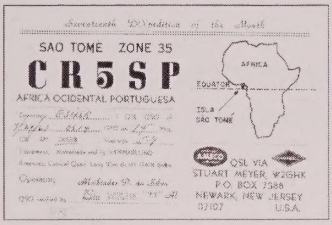
☐ PSE QSL

TNX QSO es 73

Opr. Ernst Salvetti „HB9KV"

CEØAE

EASTER ISLAND



Seventeenth DXpedition of the Month

SAO TOME ZONE 35

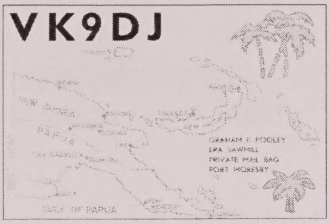
CR5SP

AFRICA OCIDENTAL PORTUGUESA

G3HSR

AFRICA
EQUATOR
ISLA SÃO TOMÉ

QSL VIA
STUART MEYER, W2GHK
P.O. BOX 7388
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY
07107 U.S.A.



VK9DJ

GRAHAM F. POOLEY
EPA SAWMILL
PRIVATE MAIL BAG
PORT MORESBY

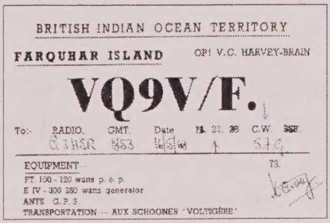
AMATEUR RADIO STATION

VQ8CG

CUREPIPE

MAURITIUS

ZONE 39



BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY

FARQUHAR ISLAND OP: V.C. HARVEY-BRAIN

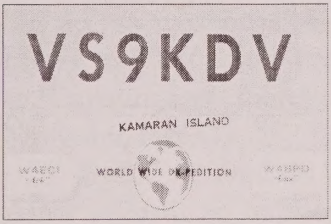
VQ9V/F.

To:-	RADIO.	GMT.	Date	14. 21. 28	C.W.	SSB.
	G3HSR	1853	16/5/68		579	

EQUIPMENT

FT. 100 - 120 watts p. e. p.
E IV - 300 350 watts generator
ANTS G. P. S.
TRANSPORTATION ... AUX SCHOONER 'VOLTIGÈRE'

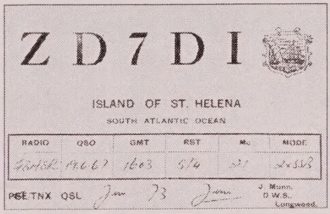
73.



VS9KDV

KAMARAN ISLAND

WORLD WIDE DXPEDITION



Z D 7 D I

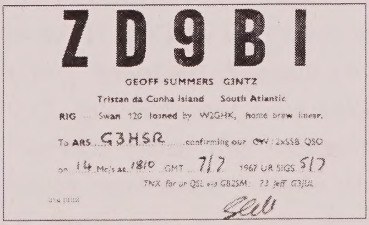
ISLAND OF ST. HELENA

SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

RADIO	QSO	GMT	RST	Mc	MODE
G3HSR	19.6.67	1603	5/4	21	2xSSB

~~PSE~~ TNX QSL Jim 73

J. Mann.
D.W.S.
Longwood.



ZD9BI

GEOFF SUMMERS G3NTZ

Tristan da Cunha Island South Atlantic

RIG — Swan 120 loaned by W2GHK, home brew linear.

To ARS G3HSR confirming our ~~CW~~ 2xSSB QSO

on 14 Mc/s at 1810 GMT 7/7 1967 UR SIGS 5/7

TNX for ur QSL via GB2SM. 73 Jeff G3JUL

Chapter 8

A HAM'S LIFE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Civil Aviation Agency, Port Moresby, 1975 -1980

My first scheduled attempt to travel to Papua New Guinea to take up my contract with the Civil Aviation Agency was cancelled due to the now notorious Cyclone Tracey of Christmas 1974. This Cyclone devastated Darwin in Northern Australia and brought everything to a standstill. No access was possible to its badly damaged airport. My travel to P.N.G. had been scheduled ex London Heathrow to Darwin and then, by a connecting flight, on to Port Moresby, P.N.G.

I finally arrived in P.N.G. some four months later in April 1975. It so happened that this year was particularly important. On the 17 September 1975, P.N.G. was due to become an independent country.

My contract was with the P.N.G. government on behalf of the Australian Civil Aviation Agency in Port Moresby. Gradually, the P.N.G. government was taking over many areas of the civil service from the incumbent Australian personnel. My contract was for a couple of years with an option to extend if both parties were agreeable. In due course I was to work for the Civil Aviation Authority

(CAA) for some 5 years, my salary being paid by the P.N.G. government on a monthly basis.

I had spent a considerable time of my working life in the world of aviation. After a weekend of settling into my accommodation, I reported to the CAA office in Konedobu (a suburb of Port Moresby) early on the Monday morning. I met my future 'boss', and after some discussion, he showed me around the office area and introduced me to my future colleagues. My final arrival (months late) at CAA office now enabled me to take up my previously scheduled position as the Airways Engineering Radio Inspector for the region. My formal designation, following the structured world of the CAA, was now that of AEWI - I still have my desk identity plaque here on Norfolk Island.

It was not a job to suit everyone as it had a continual commitment to oversee the many CAA sites all over P.N.G. and, in addition, a site at Honiara in the nearby Solomon Islands. These sites were all part of the network of navigational and other aids around the country which included the airports of P.N.G. with their own self-contained radio equipment covering the control tower, etc. As a recent addition of only a year or so to the world of single men, to me travelling around was no great hassle.

To say that P.N.G. is a diverse country would have to be the understatement of the year. A large island in itself (shared by West Irian Jaya to the northwest), it consists of hundreds of islands of various shapes and sizes. Bougainville, for example, is very large. The country has many different cultures and ethnic groups. It is said there are over 700 different languages, in addition to Pidgin - a sort of common language.

A central rib of mountains divides the mainland mass. Peaks reach in excess of 15,000 feet and this forms the main division between what was Papua and New Guinea. As a result, one tribal group in one valley can be effectively cut off from another group in a neighbouring valley. Each group is almost unaware of each other's existence and so each has developed quite differently.

Looking back on those days I realise how fortunate I have been. When I finally left some 5 years later I had been in most areas of the vast widely divergent areas of P.N.G. It was a wonderful experience but often very hard and tiring work. There is no escape in an area such as Civil Aviation. There is no room for any mistakes.

At the various major centres having an airport, the station was run in communication terms by a Technical Officer. The equipment involved had to be kept up to standard by regular inspections (the station had the staff, of course, to 'fix' any of the many communications equipment transmitters and receivers should the need arise).. In addition there was a need for continual monitoring of spares held by the main CAA stores in Port Moresby.

So I, as the AEWI, would visit the outlying stations, and in due course would arrive to assist in the scheduled inspections of all equipment. During the visit, a few days were spent on going over all past records since the last AEWI visit, looking at problems with stores, local difficulties, etc. I would assist with the inspection schedule for that month, and at the same time would check test equipment. Often there might be a need to tackle an equipment fault together as the daily routine went on, even if the radio inspector was on base.

So in this way, over the years, I travelled around Lae, Wewak, Mt. Hagen, Goroka, Rabaul, etc, and I had finally 'arrived' in a sense when, on visiting some site or another, saw that the records had been signed by myself several months previously. Many of the CAA sites were unmanned since they were in a remote area. In such a case it often meant the nearest CAA station making a quick 'two ringer' on a dedicated telephone line to the site. This action would immediately bring up the standby unit to return the facility availability to 'normal'.

Then, of course, there was an urgency to get any faulty unit fixed ready to then act as standby for the next incident. The local technical staff would head out to the site (perhaps a long four-wheeled drive journey) to fix the equipment. Some of these remote spots were often very dirty with occasional rat damage, and so they required a check up. If required, the AEWI report would highlight any problems so a move was made to tidy these sites up. An example would be reporting a leaky roof needing urgent repair. It made sense, as it would certainly add reliability to the equipment housed in these areas.

As Radio Inspector I would be in Moresby most days attending my desk working within the CAA loop. This work was often in connection with circuit diagram upgrades to CAA facilities with perhaps the organising of equipment changes and the endless ongoing headache of sourcing replacement parts. The CAA stores system was huge and my first impression was of an excellent system. I found it a fair copy of the RAF stores system (probably courtesy of the RAAF) with a section, a part number and item description. After twelve years in the RAF I knew they system well.

Due to the ongoing hand-over to the P.N.G. government, there was a move in place to clean up and slim down the vast amount of material being held. Many of the parts (e.g. in our area) were held for equipment made obsolete years before. This was a huge undertaking and very time consuming for several of us involved in this updating process. The computer had not quite arrived in those days, especially in areas such as P.N.G.!

Within an organization like the CAA there had to be an answer to everything in the event of any communications problem. In the case of a real incident (e.g. equipment failure), we had to check that the back-up beacon (for instance) had come on line okay during the flight that had reported the problem.

Until Independence, in terms of Amateur Radio and DXCC, two separate countries existed; Papua and New Guinea. No real distinction was ever made in callsign allocation, both areas having a VK9 prefix. In addition, to confuse the issue further, this same VK9 prefix was used in several other territories of Australia and these were also separate DXCC Countries. It was always good fun working a VK9 and then keeping fingers crossed, hoping it was one you needed. It is also true to say that the long-term residents of these various areas were known to the DX fraternity. Ray Hoare, VK9RH was Norfolk Island; Bob Sutherland, VK9BS, was Papua; and there were several other similar stations.

Prior to independence, the Post and Telegraph Department had been gradually taking over more of the radio licensing structure from Australia. As an indication of this, the prefix P2 was introduced and, in order that identities of previous license holders were preserved, VK9BS became P29BS, VK9DJ became P29DJ, etc. These changes had come into force on 01 January 1975, so that when I applied for a license shortly after my arrival, I was issued P29JS. It was a common practice on those days to issue a license with one's initials as the suffix. That JS for James Smith was a rather nice personal touch.

The Post and Telecommunications Corporation dealt with Amateur Radio licensing. Whilst P.N.G. did not have reciprocal licensing with every country, nevertheless it is true to say that many licenses were duly recognized (a good example was the recognition of my G3HSR licence). Frequency allocations were excellent, but in some cases differed from those in Australia.

Probably one of the most significant events was the introduction of the Novice license. This license had limited HF allocation, an easier theory paper and a Morse code requirement of 5 wpm. The first Novice license was issued to Ron Pain (P29NRP) in March 1977.

The result of the Novice license was that many were able to make a start in Amateur Radio who might not have been able to do so previously.

In addition, 'Z' calls were also issued. These amateurs had passed the full theory examined qualification, but lacked the need for the Morse code. Many remained as 'Z' calls from choice. They had no HF privileges, but preferred the challenge of VHF, UHF, etc, being content with 6m openings, satellite working and VHF/UHF studies. Rick Warnett (P29ZPS) was very well known in these areas.

P.N.G. in those days had quite a large Amateur Radio population, but like amateurs everywhere else, many were not active. Three 'nationals' had full calls: P29SK, P29LL, P29KP, and many were studying for Novice and Full Calls.

The Papua New Guinea Amateur Radio Society (P.N.G.ARS) is built on strong foundations but it had some problems; the usual changing migrant expatriate population kept the Society in a state of flux. An active QSL Bureau and regular meetings helped to keep things together. However, many never got to attend a monthly meeting in the 'Big Smoke' (Port Moresby) since many were 'up country.'

I was very active in the P.N.G.ARS as President of the Association for a period of two or three years. In addition, since I had previous extensive experience in dealing with the UK, RAE (Radio Amateur Examination) I set up a similar style teaching framework in Port Moresby. I taught the P.N.G. Theory and Regulation equivalent (which was based on the Australian syllabus) over a period of a few years. In addition, I was able to teach the Morse code to quite a few students. I have several 'passes' to my (and their) credit. One such person was, in a strange way, to start me on the road to Heard Island, but that is another story.

In terms of possible radio locations, P.N.G. has a lot of variety. From coastal areas such as Lae, Madang, Port

Moresby, Rabaul, etc., two major centres - Goroka and Mount Hagen - are both in the temperate highlands, at altitudes of over 4,000 feet. Some of the more remote sites have to be seen to be believed, with their majestic scenery of breath taking beauty. Usually, there is an active radio amateur in each of the main areas.

Propagation from here can be unique: a near equatorial spot, a reasonable station, not forgetting a bit of decent sunspot activity and one can be in business. Put a few dB's on for the P29 call sign and I suppose one could say we had it made. Most of the Asian countries are easily worked - AP, BY, VS6, XU, YB, 9V, all within the proverbial 'spitting distance.' Long-path openings around the equator had to be experienced to be believed.

As P29JS during the years between 1975 and 1980, I was very active on all bands and amassed a huge QSO total. Then the internationally known 'Two-twenty Net' (later the 'Triple Two Net') on the 20m band became a huge centre of DX attraction with an amazing following. The frequency move was a result of the then famous Russian Woodpecker! Bring back memories? Yes, I thought that it might! One weekend with not much to do, in a check of my net records, I reckoned that some 300 countries had checked in over the years. The amount of mail I received was staggering – QSL cards by the thousands of course, but also letters.

I will also mention that naturally there were problems. First there were a few DXers who disagreed with the NET idea. I agreed that 'they' had their right to disagree BUT nothing ever justified the often ferocious, (I use the word carefully) deliberate QRM interference experienced. These were big stations with good equipment and experienced operators – it was hard to justify what they did. I could, of course, point the finger at several callsigns, many of who are now silent keys. I hear my old US 6-land station occasionally, still around with his huge signal, still as argumentative as always.

One example will suffice. It is fact and so cannot be disputed. The station lost his licensing privileges for a period of two years. He was not in the US but in Europe. His level of daily QRM was mind boggling in its consistency, always on CW. So, in a way, the net could go ahead with what became a nuisance factor. The guy meant business and his modus operandi was to 'talk' to himself on CW on the net frequency. He would go through the motions of being in QSO with another station. He was well known for his potent signal, especially on the low bands. He used fictitious - usually G - callsigns (he was not in England). Anyway, a certain EU country had a monitoring and tracking station and so it happened that radio amateurs were involved in staffing of the station. With not much else to do in those early hours (EU Time) of the 220 Net 'they' started to monitor the morning net and take an interest in our friend. "Keep him talking" (his CW of course) messages came to me on other bands. They informed the relevant authorities in the country concerned what they were doing. One fine morning, as our friend had settled in for his morning 2 hours of QRM, he had a knock on his door. With irrefutable proof that he was violating his licensing conditions he was shut down.

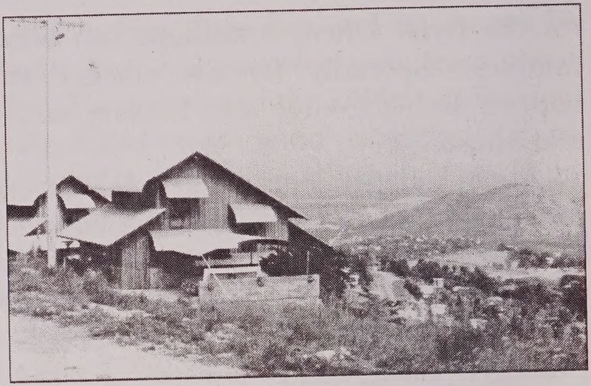
(I was to come across him once again a few years later during a DXpedition to Cocos (Keeling) - I would recognise his QRMing fist anywhere. Sadly he was back on the air, up to his old tricks again).

In addition, I went on several exotic DXpeditions during my leave periods, thus proving that P.N.G. was not a remote backwater. Port Moresby has an excellent international airport, (Jackson's Airport) with a long and memorable history and was famous in WWII.

Regular daily flights to Australia and other areas can get one into the main air traffic stream fairly easily. In fact, both Papua and New Guinea were deeply involved with pioneer flying in the early days. It is not a forgiving country for the flyer. Often, conditions can become marginal in minutes, especially for the smaller aircraft. Accidents happen and 'the edge' can be very small between safety and disaster.

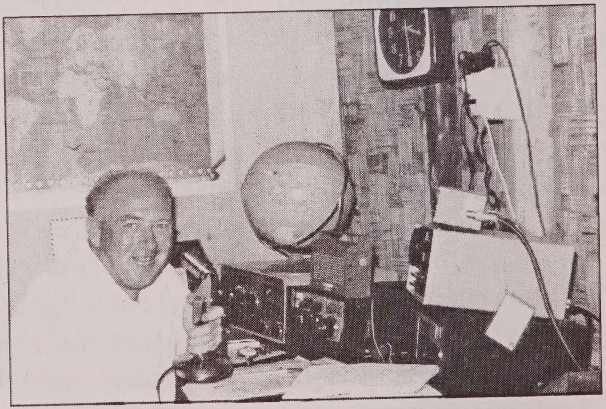
As an independent country, P.N.G. continued moving forward out of the stone-age mentality, out of inter-tribal fighting, out of tribal control, towards the future. The transition was not easy and there were problems In particular, the movement of a people of simple and primitive backgrounds towards the bright lights of the cities meant hundreds of people were looking for housing which did not exist and were looking for work that wasn't there either.

It seemed that fate had taken a liking to me as a few years after leaving P.N.G. (for good) I was back there again in the country wearing a different 'hat' within CAA. This was after the HIDXA 'DXpedition to Heard Island, 1983' but then again, that is another story. Stay tuned!

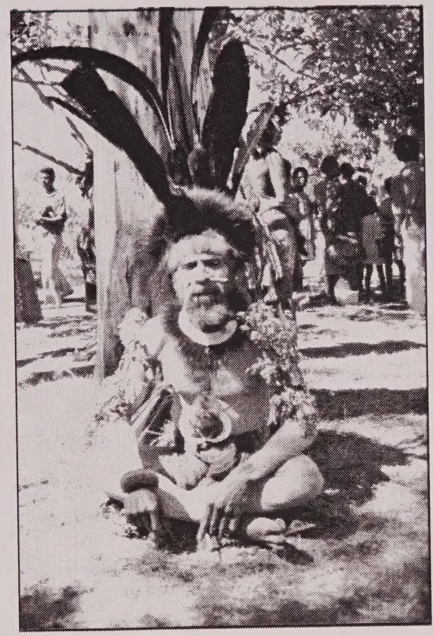


Very hazy view over Port Moresby, P.N.G.

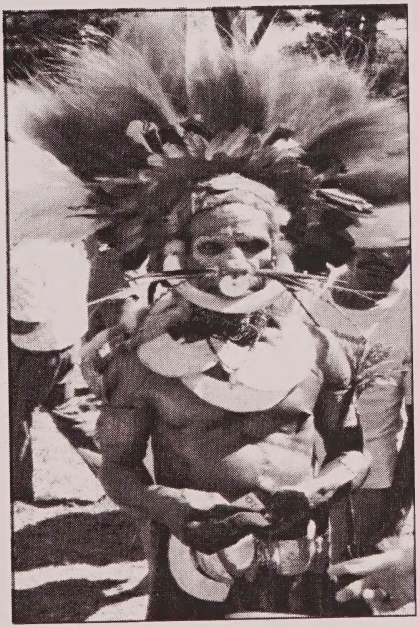
Goroka Highlands show, P.N.G.



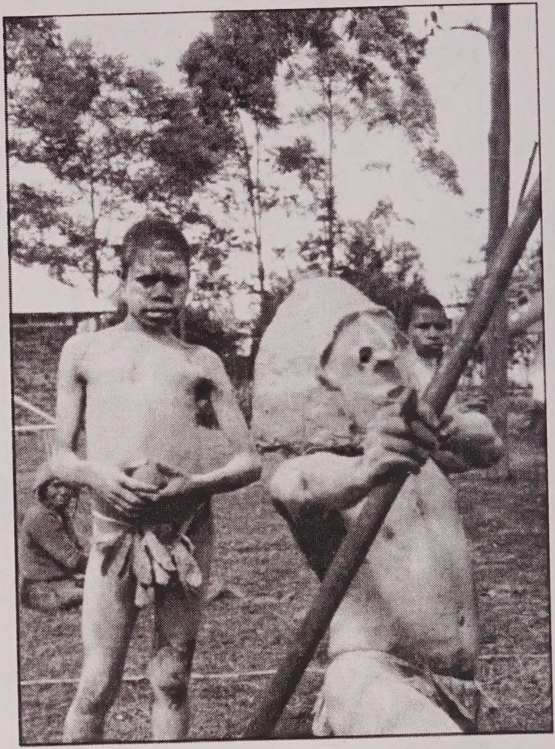
Danny Coyle, P29CC, Mount Hagen, P.N.G.



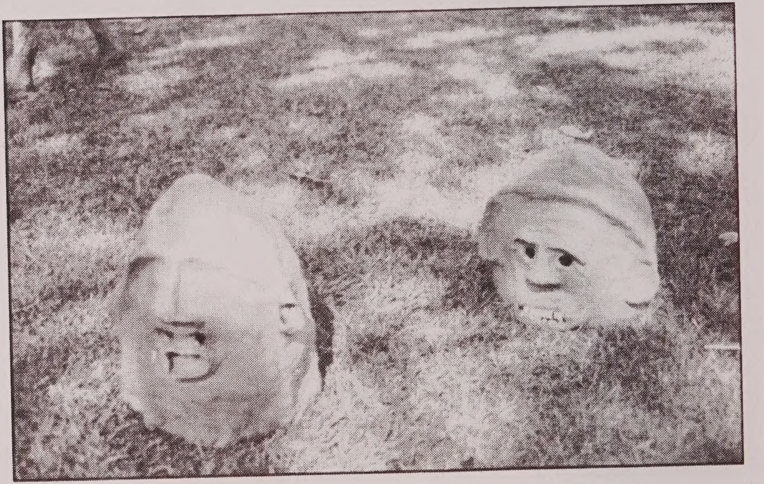
Not too showy, Goroka Show, P.N.G.



You are not dreaming! Goroka Show.



A Mudman of the Goroka Highlands, P.N.G.



Heads you with tails you lose. Mudman Men heads, Goroka.

Modern Miss, Goroka Show, P.N.G.

Bowmen of Goroka, P.N.G.

Another bowman, Goroka Show, P.N.G.

The Goroka Show, P.N.G.

Chapter 9

DXPEDITIONS FROM P.N.G. 1975 -1980.

The Republic of Nauru, C21AA, 26 Nov. – 7 Dec. 1979.

An opportunity arose via Civil Aviation Agency (CAA) over the possibility of visiting C21, the Republic of Nauru, for the purpose of operating Amateur Radio. For various reasons, Nauru had moved steadily up the 'wanted' list, especially in terms of CW. Eventually, I visited the Island and was able to operate, signing C21AA. This callsign belonged to John Bill, a Nauruan who worked within the Civil Aviation Agency at the Nauru International airport. John, C21AA, was not very active and invariably when he operated, hundreds of radio amateurs wanted to work him for a new country. He really disliked the continual 'pile-ups'. The bad news was that it was impossible to get a C21 Amateur Radio license. John, C21AA, had an answer; there was no problem in my using his callsign during a visit. For good measure adding "Stay with us and we will make you welcome." My operation would be from within his shack and house - the licensed premises.

For several years, Amateur Radio licenses for outsiders had become a 'no-no' with Nauruan authorities. The history was that a Japanese Amateur Radio group had gone there and had been issued individual Amateur Radio licenses. They stayed on Nauru for a week or so before returning home. The group made many contacts and on return to Japan, had naturally written about their DXpedition.

The Japanese language is, like Chinese, a blank wall to a large part of the world. John told me that within their JA Amateur Radio magazine article they had been highly derogatory in some of their comments about Nauru and had apparently been specific in a couple of cases. In due course, the matter came to a head with the Nauruan government shutting the door to foreign radio amateurs. This situation had been in place for some time.

The International Airport straddles the bottom edge in the Yaven district of the Island. On landing on Nauru, John was there to meet me. Customs was a mere formality and, shortly after we were at his house. The house was large and airy, a definite requirement on tropical Nauru. Nauru is just south of the equator and can be very humid and sticky. However, it also had the means to be ‘shut up’ quickly. The tropical storms in the area can be vicious; very windy and very wet.

I was soon settled in domestically and with John’s help, quickly had my modest ICOM 701, 100 watt station set up. My HF6V multi-band vertical antenna had been erected and shortly after, the rig was switched on. Everything appeared to be fine. Over the coming 10 days I was able to be reasonably active. The family atmosphere was also very pleasant and I was made to feel completely at ease. (As an aside, I have always taken and used my own equipment on my DXpeditions).

John insisted that I also learned something about Nauru as my knowledge was very rudimentary. Nauru had a population of around 13,000 and had become independent in 1970 when the New Zealand and Australian governments relinquished their joint control of the Island’s phosphate concessions. Phosphate, this wonderful fertilizer, had practically 'made' the Australian farm industry and to a lesser degree, that of New Zealand. Later, Nauru became a member of the Commonwealth, but remains outside of the UN

The Republic of Nauru is a single island; its area is only some 8 sq. miles and it has a very nice coastal road. One could spend days going round and around, admiring the splendour of the ocean within 'spitting distance'. A large proportion of the residences lie along the coastal road, as this provides easy access to the sea for the staple Nauruan food supply of fish.

On this quick look around, we start at the main coastal area of Yaven where ships from New Zealand and Australia arrive and ply their trade with phosphate. They arrived laden with fresh water as ballast, which was then unloaded. They duly left with the holds filled with raw, Nauruan phosphate. With no safe port, the ships stand off the Island. They can nudge quite close to land as there are three entrances cut through the reef. One of the three huge cantilever devices is unfolded to reach the ship. On a continuous belt cycle the raw phosphate travels from land into the hold; a process completed as quickly as possible. Time is money.

Nothing prepared me for what I was to see during my stay. It is when one gets to the inner areas of the Island that what had happened (and is still happening) to Nauru seemed to be appalling. At those phosphate fields (my own expression), along with John, I looked with amazement at the lunar landscape of the terrain; jagged perpendicular peaks of limestone with seemingly boundless empty spaces in between. John explained how at one time the area would have been covered with undergrowth, nesting birds, and hundreds of growing shrubs. However, underneath there lay these huge deposits of phosphate; in fact, the droppings of countless sea-birds over a period of aeons.

With hired indentured labour, the phosphate deposits were gradually and painstakingly removed, ready for shipping off the Island. The land was privately owned, but pre-independence the owners only received a pittance. Such was the power of the Phosphate giants. This had now changed and after showing me the area of his family land (as yet un-mined) the air temperature was like a furnace, so John suggested that we should quit and leave to cool off.

After a short drive from the Phosphate area we were soon back on the coastal road, with its cooling breeze, pulling into the yard of a Nauruan home. "This is my younger brother's place, you'll like it here." John headed for the back of the house and on following I noticed that the sea was quite close. After the usual introductions, hospitality and general chatter, there was a question to be asked. "What are those standing 'poles' nearby, and why is there a bird standing on each?"

Next day, back in the shack and after a long spell of operating when band conditions had been very good, John arrived back from work. We had a nice cold drink together, and resumed our conversation. "You noticed the Frigate birds at my brother's home. They are part of the Nauruan culture." I had noticed these wonderful birds in other Pacific areas before. However, as John explained, on Nauru they keep them as pets. The birds I had been looking at had been tied to those posts with a leg tie! "We rear these special ones to hunt for us." Immediately, I had visions of a bird diving to catch a fish. Then what? Bringing the fish back to the kitchen?

John explained that to the Nauruan the frigate bird was special. In their language, there were 12 words for the bird which gave the gender and its age in terms of young to middle age. A young frigate bird is caught and kept tied up, and treated like a pet, hence those posts. A great deal of effort goes into the rearing of the bird(s) and it takes up a lot of time. Fish has to be caught to feed them, but, as John said, “these days we often buy frozen fish from the store”.

It takes several months to train them. Then they are released daily but will return to be fed and re-tethered for the night. Just to make quite sure, some feathers are pulled from the bird and their flight behaviour indicates (to the trained eye) that they are tame - they belong to someone! The birds are often fed in flight by throwing their food in the air for the bird to catch. This is done on a regular basis as they come very close to be fed. They enjoy swooping down to catch the bits of fish.

It is the catching and rearing of the frigate bird that is the passion of the men. There is even a catching competition season lasting about a week and no women are allowed. Also the Nauruan male will not eat fish during this period.

A platform (lattice work) is raised about 6m above ground. On this platform about 4m X 6m, several tame frigate birds are tethered. They are kept apart so that none will attack each other. Under normal circumstances they are used to being apart. A few other tame birds are now released and since they will come back to feed, they will often have an ‘outside’ bird follow them home. Each of the tame birds and any wild birds make swooping dives towards their perch to be fed, the fish being thrown into the air as mentioned before.

At the same time, birds on the platform are being fed and also getting agitated as they usually did at meal time. Their agitation is also helped by those underneath the platform prodding them with a stick! It is bedlam! The visiting frigate bird(s) get more curious and gradually swoop closer. By the use of a fine line with a stone at the end, the Nauruan hunter tries to snare the bird. It is a busy time and several birds are caught; often a bird is caught by two or more lines.

The session ends with a tally of birds caught; an older bird is worth more points as they are supposed to be wiser and hence harder to catch! Finally, at the end of the week, the losing team has to provide a feast for the winners. There are songs, dances and stories told of how clever they had been (the winners) and how clumsy others (the losers) had been.

I enjoyed John, telling me this story. An ancient, Nauruan sport shrouded in mystery, of past tales and endless contests of winners and losers. The frigate bird is used by Air Nauru as its commercial symbol.

As the days passed, from a DXpedition point of view, things were going very well. I liked the C21AA callsign. It more or less said everything; the first Amateur Radio license issued after independence. Only a few operators called me John, and a few queried my status, with the usual sorts of questions; who, where, why, and whom!

Back on yet another trip to the phosphate area, I could see things in a completely different light. As John explained how recruited labour had dug, sweated and hauled phosphate from within these coral peaks I began to understand. He then explained that all the areas belonged to the various Nauruan families. During the phosphate era, large areas had been mined and cleaned out with no recompense.

John explained how after independence, Nauru had fought the phosphate giants in court over the exploitation. A huge nine figure payment was made in compensation for the greed and damage done in the name of phosphate mining.

Since independence, the Nauruan owners now received fair payment for their phosphate. John explained, "I am lucky, our family area has yet to be mined. Soon I'll be a rich man."

As I write this, many years later, the phosphate era is all but over and despite it all, the payment of compensation payments, etc., Nauru is now bankrupt!

By this time, I had visited many Nauruan homes, each with their collection of captured Frigate birds. Already, I was an expert (only joking), and I could spot the finer points of this bird or that bird. It reminded me of my own 'budgerigar keeping' days, mentioned elsewhere in this book.

One day on a visit, there was some excitement. A 'wanted' frigate bird had been sighted in a group. Birds were released with suitable words: "It's that one on the left, that's the one I want." It was amazing to see these proud birds in action. In due course, a bird was chaperoned, driven, or whatever, down to the bird area and captured with a net or that line routine. They had obviously all done this before! A few calls and each of the birds arrived back at their perch where they were rewarded with a fish treat and a leg tie again.

It was wonderful meeting the Nauruan people. Whilst there, I met the rest of the local 'hams' and in later years some of us were to meet again. I met, Reuben, C21RK, Frank, C21FS, etc.

Finally, with endless hospitality and stories of Frigate birds and Nauruan history, I had learned a great deal about the country.

Soon it was time to go. In those days I seemed to travel more easily, with not quite so much luggage. John saw me off at the airport and I had certainly enjoyed my stay. We were to keep in touch over the years. I was happy with my 10,000 QSOs, with plenty of CW activity, from this tiny island, and few hours later I was back in P.N.G.

The Solomon Islands, VR4BJ and H44BJ, 1975-1980.

Whilst I was working in P.N.G. with CAA, we had a navigational facility (DME) at Henderson Field, Honiara Airport, located on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. Guadalcanal is one the 6 main islands forming the Solomon Islands Group. The other islands are Malaita, New Georgia, Makaira (San Crisobal), Santa Isobel and Choiseul.

The DME facility was subject to a fairly regular (depending on aircraft availability) servicing routine, and a radio technician from Port Moresby airport was assigned the task. As a result, the facility came within my radio inspection schedules. These inspections were on a fairly frequent basis, and Air Nuigini flight schedules usually meant a three day stop-over. The basic inspection did not take long and since it was invariably tied to a maintenance trip, all was straight forward.

I decided that I would try to get a VR4 license and operate for a couple of days on the occasional trip. I checked with the hotel manager to see whether there was any objection to setting up a simple station. There was no objection at all, and so later that day I visited the licensing area in downtown Honiara. Shortly after, I was issued with VR4BJ, with BJ the closest possible initials of my name, James Bruce Smith. There was one condition; I should have to mail a copy of my P29JS license, which I did not have with me, to the office. They would acknowledge receipt and my VR4BJ callsign would then be activated.

I held the VR4BJ callsign for some time and was able to use it quite easily. I would carry a rig, mike, key, and a made-up dipole antenna and set it all up at the hotel. Later, I carried a vertical, easily assembled, as an alternative antenna. The pile-ups were usually quite large and as a result I was able to make many QSOs.

It was to be in July 1978 that the Solomon Islands became independent and my call was changed to H44BJ. I made arrangements to go over to Honiara for a few days. The stay was, as usual, tied to Air Nuigini schedules to and from Port Moresby.

During that period, I was better equipped in that I had a linear amplifier; in those days it was a home brew Heathkit 220. I was to find out (the hard way) that the amplifier did not travel well; the heavy transformer came loose during shipment. It had really been designed to stay in one's shack. The location was very nice, close to the sea, and over the period of my stay I worked many stations. There was one further benefit. One of the H44 stations offered to show me around as he was based in Honiara and knew the area well.

The Solomon's (especially Guadalcanal) had become an unwitting host to a particularly brutal period of the WW2 Pacific theatre war. The causalities ran to many thousands.

During my stay, I was taken too many areas of Honiara to see the effects of war: Henderson Field, Red Beach, Bloody Ridge and others so well known in name only. Things will have changed now, but in those days, rows of track-type vehicles were still parked in lines, silently being covered by the encroaching jungle. Endless wartime material stacked in heaps here there everywhere. That old saying "*Out of sight, out of mind*" seemed to be true.

Although I had seen similar scenes in P.N.G., there is that period of thought as one looks at the wreckage of an airplane; shot down, engine failure, or whatever. The pilot had probably died at that same spot. Of course, like others of my age, we had seen the black and white flickering footage of these air, sea, and land battles at the local cinema. It is a sobering thought to overlook a beach where several thousand troops had died.

I also met Solomon Islanders who had served with valour in the bloody Pacific carnage. They were touching meetings and they had their story to tell. Their English was excellent, and I told them that I, too, had been in the services. Though fate had dealt me a different hand, I had been too young to be in the services during the war.

I have many memories, all now somewhat vague, but I know that in Honiara I had been face to face with the brutality of war.

On a slightly lighter note, we radio amateurs love those rare DXCC QSL cards. I have one memory of the Solomon Islands as G3HSR as I had worked a VR4 station. My only contact with this rare country and the problem was that I could never get the QSL card. It transpired that the station in question was still around but very inactive. I suggested that perhaps we should go and see him, say hello, twist his arm (only joking) and perhaps get that important QSL card.

It is a long story, but we did meet. Yes he had the logs, and yes he recalled receiving my QSL card(s) but where they were he had no idea. So an arrangement was made. I would give him the date of the QSO - he only worked 20m CW – and if I was in the log, he would see to it that a card was written and mailed to me in Port Moresby. I had my main G3HSR records with me in Port Moresby and I sent him the information in the mail. From memory it took four months, but I received the QSL card okay. Several months later, he became a Silent Key; sometimes it is a strange old life.

We had several get-togethers in town with local hams, and I must say that I was made very welcome. Many knew my P29JS call as I was very active in those days.

Soon it was back to P.N.G. via the Air Nuigini flight. I was to visit the Solomon Islands a couple more times, but that's another story.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Joint DXpedition, VK9YL and VK9YS, 31 May – 13 June 1978.

Whilst in P.N.G. the 14220 (222) net became a daily event and even today it is still remembered. It started off as a result of my tendency to work on one frequency on 20m SSB. I favoured 14220 (222) as it was above the usual DXpedition split as they worked on 14195. They usually said listening 'Up' and said '14200 – 210', rarely looking above 14215. The band below 14195 was usual busy with VK stations and then lower down the band was used by the French-speaking radio hams from New Caledonia, etc. I also liked the one-frequency routine as DXers knew where to find me.

In any case I had many daily friendly QSOs on 14220. Len, KG6SW (Sweet Willie), would be a good example and literally dozens of Pacific stations would give me a call. I have always been interested in DXing and 14220 became a meeting place for the swapping of DX information. As P29JS, I kept up to date with what was (or was about) to happen in our world of DXing. It was from these meetings that the 14220 net started.

Many DXers came on frequency and as things progressed would ask if they could have a QSO with this or that station. It very quickly multiplied and a measure of control was put in place. It was in this way that I became a Net Controller and 14220 became a daily meeting place and DX Net.

In time Ann, F6CYL, a well known DXer often came on frequency, almost always with some DX information and often wanting a QSO with a station on channel. In due course Ann along with several other DXers became invaluable in helping to run this fast growing net of regulars. She had also travelled extensively and had operated from several locations.

In due course she made arrangement to come to Port Moresby as she had contact with a French family in the city. She also wished to visit Danny, P29CC, in Mount Hagen. She then planned to travel to Western Australia, returning to Paris with one further stop over.

I had carried out several DXpeditions from Port Moresby and had recently taken out two licenses namely VK9XS and VK9YS. I had been thinking about trying to activate both Cocos (Keeling) Islands (a very rare DX location) and if possible also Christmas Island. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands was awkward in the sense that one needed special permission to visit the island. I was lucky (and hence my interest) in that Australia had a CAA Air Traffic Control centre there. Maintenance staff was based on the island to service the air traffic control equipment, so there was a CAA radio technician in place on an on-going basis. The CAA staff changed over every couple of years as it was one of those dream postings!

So as my own plans to activate VK9Y moved ahead the idea that she might be able to have the callsign VK9YL became a reality. I was able to point her in the direction of seeking permission and this was done. Approval for a visit came quite quickly as by this time I knew all the main contact points and so on. She was literally just a few steps behind me.

A couple of weeks later her plans had become more firm and Ann made arrangement to come to Port Moresby. There was no difficulty with Amateur Radio licensing. I had approached P.N.G. Telecoms and they had duly issued P29AC for her use. In due course Ann arrived in Port Moresby and things had moved another huge step.

Ann was able to operate using her P29AC callsign by using my well-equipped station. I worked all day of course so there was no difficulty. During her stay she was also to witness first hand exactly what the net was like from the P.N.G. end!! Her plans to travel to Mount Hagen were finalised and in due course Danny, P29CC, was able to show her around.

Meanwhile my own plans had changed somewhat in that I now had to set up two sets of equipment for use on Cocos (Keeling). It was my view (and that of Ann) that each of us would have to operate on a completely different and separate basis. Also by this time Ann had met all of my CAA friends and had visited all the usual places in Moresby that one could visit.

Finally we were on our way and duly arrived in Perth, Western Australia. I had a couple of VK6 contacts there and they were very helpful. There was much to do before either of us could board the flight to Cocos (Keeling). Ann had also to re-confirm her onward flight bookings. I also did everything possible to ensure that all the equipment travelled with us.

Once on Cocos (Keeling) all the formalities were soon completed for our stay on the island. With the help of Bruce (CAA Tech) and his truck all the radio equipment was taken to the site where the rigs would be set up. Bruce had arranged that we would have access to an unused CAA radio receiver site. It had power, lighting and some furniture in the form of desks and a few chairs available. It had been a very lucky break and we set up the two separate stations with Ann on one side and me on the other. Our antenna separation was really very good and there were even a couple of towers which I could climb like a monkey!

In due course the stations were set up with no major hiccups and basically the only rule was NO CHANGE OF BAND without mutual agreement. The last thing we wanted was the two stations working on one band - a great way to blow front end R/F amplifiers using a MOSFET. This of course inevitably happened, and as a result we had one very dead receiver towards the end of the DXpedition.

Band conditions as I recall were really very good and of course this low lying atoll is just a perfect radio location. The bands were open more or less continuously and we both certainly made our share of contacts. I worked quite a lot of CW as Cocos (Keeling) was very rare on this mode.

Cocos (Keeling) is a really beautiful place and we did the mandatory sight-seeing. My grandson has one of the artefacts I purchased there, a wonderful model of the boats the Cocos islanders use. Thanks to Bruce and his CAA clout we were also allowed to visit Direction Island. This was an island of historic significance, part of the international cable network of bygone days. Not to mention a 'going over' by a German warship during the war. Of course, most of the site has gone, but Bruce had some background information and by looking around one could see various remnants. On this small island one could also see the bases of old radio masts and the outline of the radio station - all very interesting. It was certainly a dream radio location, and one wonders how the operators passed their time when they were off duty.

Again, with the clout of CAA, we were able to visit Home Island. Our movements were restricted but at least we could form an opinion of this small island. It was the home of the legendary King of Cocos.

The atoll is certainly a place of great beauty and I took dozens of photographs. It was to be many years later that I visited the island again. Many things had changed since my first visit. I retained my VK9YS license for many years.

Each of us had made a large number of QSOs; it was a great DX location and for Europe a very easy shot. The time passed quickly and soon it became time to get ready to leave. It had been a successful DXpedition. There had been the usual equipment glitches but in general all had gone very well.

Soon we arrived back in Perth where I had a mandatory stop over awaiting the next connecting flight to Port Moresby. In addition of course I had to deal with the radio equipment and its air freight to Port Moresby. Ann was due to leave Perth on the late evening flight, so it was all a bit of a rush. Three of the better known VK6 DXers came down to see Ann off, which I thought was very nice. Of course they had been following the progress of the VK9YL and VK9YS operation and have often said hello during our stay. I had really enjoyed the visit to this area and I think that Ann felt the same way

A few days later I was back in Port Moresby and back at work at my CAA desk. As usual, on that first visit to the PO in Konedobe there was a huge stack of mail for me. I enjoyed a wonderful friendship with the Postal Staff; I think they learned a great deal about the outside world from my mail. After all, it came from the Soviet Union and pretty well every other country of the world. They enjoyed this geography lesson and I noted that already the first requests for a VK9YS QSL card had arrived!!

DXpedition to Norfolk Island, VK9NS February 1980.

Captain Cook, in command of the *HMS Resolution,* was sailing from New Caledonia to New Zealand in 1774 when he discovered a largish island with two adjacent smaller islands nearby. In those far off days, 'patronage' was the life blood for those carrying out exploration journeys to all parts of the world. On this voyage (Cook was to make several) his patron was the Duchess of Norfolk. In this way the Island was named Norfolk after her and the other nearby islands became known as Nepean and Phillip. The choice of those names came later in the story of Norfolk Island.

Captain Cook was certain that 'they' were the first to discover and set foot on the Island. There is a commemorative area (complete with plaque) on the Island, where it is believed that Cook made his landing.

There have been signs found in recent years which seem to indicate that a group of Polynesians (always the roving seamen) might have landed here. If they did so, then it seems that any stay was only on a temporary basis. There were no signs of any form of permanent settlement.

Norfolk Island and those adjacent two protrude from a large under-water ridge connecting New Caledonia to New Zealand. The ocean is very deep and these are the only land areas which protrude from this ridge. In another well know term, 'tips of the iceberg'.

Captain Cook, perhaps above all else, was attracted by the native *Aurokaria* which is now known as the Norfolk Pine (lucky Duchess of Norfolk). It grows to a great height of 150-200 feet, and is straight and true. In Cook's view, the tree was ideal for the making of ships' masts. Britain was a maritime nation currently involved in the American War of

Independence and required vast stocks of suitable mast timber. Flax, also a vital commodity for the making of the sails of ships, grew in abundance on the Island, apparently, in those days just like a weed.

It became urgent to occupy Norfolk Island as quickly as possible as this would then establish British ownership for all time. There was one other factor in that the French had been showing an interest in the general area.

To avoid a long and complicated write-up, I will be as brief as possible. In January of 1788, the First Fleet had landed its 'transported' human cargo at Botany Bay, Australia. These were the first of a steady stream of individuals 'transported' from Britain for various misdemeanours. This was the start of many years of the deporting of 'felons' (transportation) to Australia. Often the offences committed were very minor indeed.

Commander of the fleet, Captain Arthur Phillip (hence Phillip Island) was not impressed with Botany Bay which had been recommended by Cook. In searching for a better site he found Sydney Cove which he stated was "the finest harbour in the world". He named the town there as Albion, but later it became the Sydney we all know today.

As Governor of the new settlement, Philip realised that he could arrange the colonising of empty Norfolk Island for England. To do this he chose Lt. Philip Gidley King to lead the pioneering party. In a careful choice from the already several hundred convicts, nine male and six female convicts were selected. They were then transported (that word again) on the vessel *HMS Supply* and duly landed on Norfolk Island on the 24 February 1788. In addition to the convicts a few other personnel made up the total number to land. This area became known as Sydney.

This period became known as the First Settlement. It was in 1806 that Governor Bligh (of *HMS Bounty* fame) ordered the evacuation of the Island. As a possession, it was becoming far too expensive to maintain. Norfolk

Island was to remain empty for nearly 20 years.

The Second Settlement began with a landing on the 6th June 1825. During the years that followed Norfolk Island became notorious for its harsh treatment of the convicts. These convicts were by definition 'the worst convicts of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land'.

In 1856 the last of the convicts were shipped out and once again Norfolk Island was empty of all human habitation. We leave the second settlement to the judgement of others, but it is not a pretty story at all.

In the meantime Pitcairn Island had been found, and the descendents of the Bounty mutineers were living in severely over-crowded conditions. In a petition to the British Crown they were granted permission to come and settle on empty Norfolk Island. On the 8th June 1856 the Pitcairners arrived on Norfolk Island, and in due course families were given land grants and began to settle in.

My interest in Norfolk Island came about as a result of an idea of visiting the island on a mini DXpedition. Charlie Shaw, VK9NI and his wife had invited me to stay at their house.

So it came about that I first came to Norfolk Island in early 1980 on a DXpedition. I had been invited by Charlie, VK9NI and his wife Stephanie, to stay with them at their house near the airport. In those days Charlie was in the world of communications and was very active on the amateur bands. Like today, there were only a handful of radio amateurs on the Island and Charlie was by far the most active of them all. He used to check into the 220 net on a regular basis and we got to know a bit about each other.

I had brought my own equipment and this was soon set up in the shed at the bottom of the garden, which resulted in my being able to operate more or less at any time of the day or night. As the days passed, my QSO total rose, and I did a lot of work on CW. The bands in those days were in amazing shape with propagation paths open for hours on end. I forget my final QSO total but it was well over 10,000 on CW and SSB.

Whilst I was there I was able to climb Charlie's tower and do some maintenance work for him. The local parrot was considered to be a pest, more so as they seemed to love coaxial cable. It's one thing to love garden produce – awaiting the right moment for fresh succulent tomatoes., but quite another thing when one's own Amateur Radio antenna goes on the 'blink' as they say. When I first went up the tower I was really surprised at the damage these parrots had done to the rotator and coax cables. In due course I made many repairs, got the rotator going again and so on. However one could hardly call it a permanent fix – they would be back for more!!

Even as the number of QSOs rose on a daily basis, Charlie and his wife Stephanie insisted in breaks of operating, taking time to show me around the Island. In addition there were numerous visits to their friends, and endless hospitality. I have several memories of very pleasant get-togethers with many people on Norfolk Island.

I certainly had my share of sightseeing, and I found Norfolk Island absolutely marvellous. I was by this time used to lush tropical growth (courtesy of P.N.G.), but the climate of Norfolk Island, lying in the sub-tropics, is quite different. The famous Norfolk Island pine is a magnificent tree and it is true to say that almost everywhere one goes they dominate the Island.

Then, as other tourists should do, there is the rich heritage of the penal colony of the 'Convict Days' to explore. In another example of man's inhumanity to man, perceived criminals (bad elements) were forcibly deported from England to the Australian mainland. As some of these convicts hardened under the brutality of the system, they ended up on Norfolk Island, an end of the line prison settlement designed to 'take care' of this unruly element.

None of that history makes pleasant reading.

The Island has another claim to fame and it came about as Norfolk Island became empty of people when the prison system shut down. Norfolk Island had become a huge burden on the system, keeping it supplied, administered and so on. A new settlement had been set up in Tasmania, much easier to manage and to feed.

As I mentioned, there had been the discovery of Pitcairn Island and the remainder of the Bounty Mutineers and their descendants. Forget the usual Clark Gable, Charles Loughton and the Hollywood hype as a true representation of this mutiny.

In any case since Pitcairn Island is very small it was very crowded with over 100 descendents of the mutiny. The islanders petitioned the British Crown to be moved, if possible, to a larger area. Norfolk Island was empty so this was in due course to become their new home in 1856. The British Navy shipped them all to Norfolk, and thus a new settlement was formed. In due course, in line with human nature, some of the Pitcairners wished to return to their own Island. After due warning that their decision was final, those who wished to return to Pitcairn did so. Hence today there is a strong historical tie between Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands. The Adams, Christians, Quintals in our telephone book can all claim direct lineage right back to one or more of the Bounty mutineers.

Of course, almost all the mutineers (some stayed in Tahiti) ended their days in hiding on far off Pitcairn. It is a tremendous story, which has been retold repeatedly with endless variations.

The story of the 'Mutiny of the Bounty' is unique in the annals of the sea. It is a story of immense proportions, whether one looks at the mutineers on Pitcairn Island, or the heroic journey of Bligh. The career of Captain Bligh that followed that of the HMS Bounty is another area of historical interest. The Islanders speak their own language (amongst themselves) which is a quaint mixture of old English and Tahitian. Dars et. (That's it.)

As there are radio amateurs on Pitcairn they are usually in great demand when they are active. Probably the best known is Tom Christian, VR6TC.

So much for a part of Norfolk Island history, now where was I?

It was on the last day on the Island that my life was to take a dramatic turn. At a farewell barbeque hosted by Charlie and Stephanie, I met Kirsti and that evening we were to spend quite a lot of time together as we seemed to have much in common. Some DXpeditions have strange endings as I shall reveal in my words to come.

A Mini DXpedition to Lord Howe Island, March 1980, VK9NS/LH.

Lord Howe Island was a rare contact in those early 1980 days. And even today it is not really active at all but Dick Hoffman, VK2AGT, was resident and quite active on a daily basis. He came on the 222 net quite frequently and around the time that Charlie invited me to Norfolk Island, Dick suggested I come to Lord Howe also. In those days there was a regular King Air flight out of Brisbane, if I remember correctly a couple of times a week. Anyway the flight called at Norfolk Island - then on to Lord Howe Island. So I had made arrangements on leaving Norfolk to fly on down to Lord Howe some 400 kms away. I would then fly back a few days later to Brisbane and then on to Port Moresby.

Lord Howe Island is a dramatic place – completely different to Norfolk and its scenery is breath taking. It is a much smaller place – I forget the exact population in those days but if I say 50 I would be close. I thoroughly enjoyed my stay at the local hotel and Dick and Noelle's place was within spitting distance. I operated as VK9NS/LH and made a fair number of contacts, however I operated using Dick's station and of course this makes a difference. It was to be some months later that I was able to repay them both for their kind invitation. I was able to invite them to P.N.G. and I had loads of room to put them up. Noelle was an accomplished artist and I still have a beautiful scenic view of the island.

Soon it was back to Port Moresby and taking off from the island reminded me that there is NOT much room and the runway straddles the neck of the island. The landing can be quite scary in a way but by this time I had landed and taken off from some pretty spectacular air strips. This one was easy.

My arrival back in Port Moresby was on schedule and I little realised how my life would change in coming months. Stay tuned!!

Local village scene near Honiara, Solomon Islands.

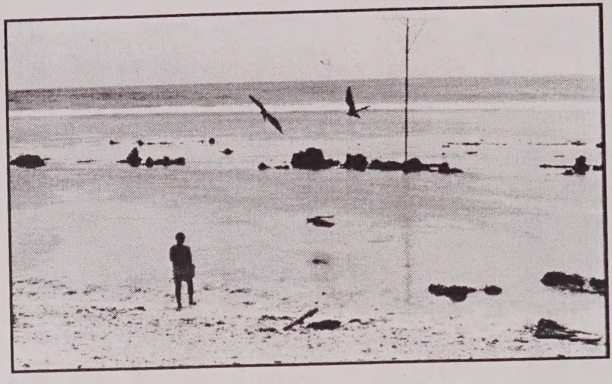
Otintai hotel, Kiribati, stop-over en route to Nauru.

John Bill, C21AA, invited me to Nauru Island.

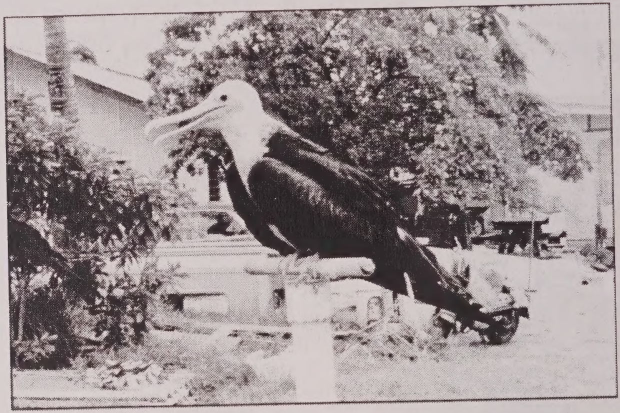
Frank Smith, (SK) C21FS, Nauru Island.

Operating on Nauru Island signing C21AA.

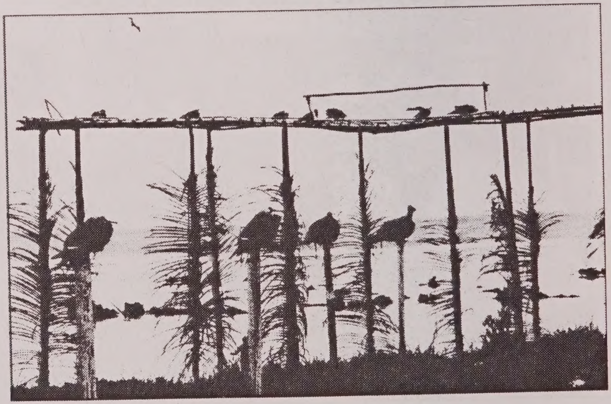
My own station as guest operator of C21AA.



Catching the Frigate bird, Nauru Island.

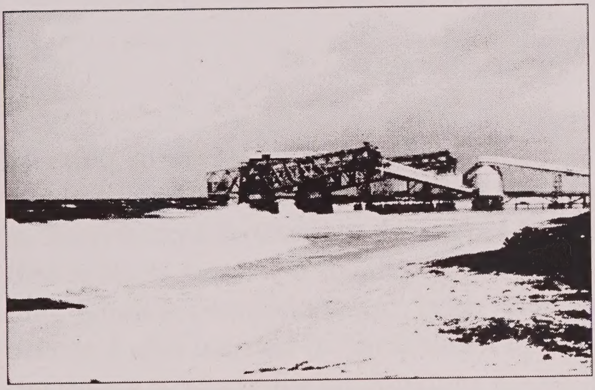


Bill, C21AA owned a very friendly pet Frigate bird.

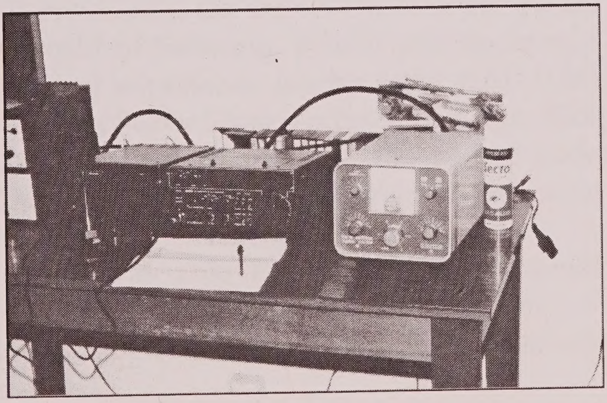


The pets of the Nauruan, the Frigate bird.

Coral pinnacles exposed after phosphate mining.



Phosphate cantilever loading gantry, Nauru Island.



VR4BJ station, Honiara, Solomon Island.

Chapter 10

RETURN TO NORFOLK ISLAND, 1980

(And in 2008 I am still here.)

Meeting Kirsti was a very important turning point in both our lives and had the immediate effect of us both wanting to keep in touch. Once back in Port Moresby, I wrote my first letter to her. As a result of that meeting, I had learned that Kirsti's profession had been that of a ship's radio officer. I also learned of her interest in Amateur Radio and the desire to study for an Amateur Radio license. This, in a way, was 'right up my street' as the saying goes.

As mentioned previously, my interest in Amateur Radio extended to the world of licensing, syllabi and teaching. I had over ten years of experience teaching the RAE (UK) syllabus at the Weston Super Mare Technical College. This included the Theory, Regulations and the Morse code requirements. Currently, I was also doing much the same in P.N.G., this time using the Australian syllabus.

So it was that I was able to gather some material together to enable Kirsti to make a proper start on her studies. With her considerable experience I did not see any major problems ahead.

In the meantime, Charlie, VK9NI was arranging to set up a station at Kirsti's home; just a little bit of pre-emption here! But Kirsti had purchased a YAESU FT 301 transceiver from someone leaving the Island; even then it was apparent that she was looking ahead.

In due course the rig was set-up and two dipole antennas covering four bands were installed. To overcome the obvious difficulty of Kirsti having no license, Charlie operated the rig. In this way Kirsti and I had weekly skeds on a Friday. It became an enjoyable routine and it helped us to keep in touch.

I usually called Charlie at sked time (I have long been a meticulous sked keeper), and then he would pass the microphone to Kirsti. There came one evening when, after the preliminaries with Charlie were completed, he hinted very broadly that Kirsti had some good news. My first reaction was "Hallelujah, she has won the National lottery!" He handed the mike to Kirsti, and it went something like this; "P29JS this is VK9NL. How do you copy?" After I picked myself up off the floor and had replied, Kirsti informed me that with her ex-maritime qualifications she could claim exemption from having to sit an examination!

It came about in a strange way. She had sent off a request for an application form for a license and in a covering letter she mentioned that she was a qualified ship's radio operator. In their reply, the authorities had asked for proof of her qualifications, stating that exemption for the examination might be a possibility. After receiving a further letter and paper work, she was notified that she qualified for a full Amateur Radio license; did she have a preference for her callsign? She chose VK9N (mandatory prefix for Norfolk Island) followed by the letter L representing LADY.

All amazing really, and of course Kirsti and I were able to continue our skeds, only now on a more frequent basis; she could now operate whenever she wished. Band conditions were just superb in those years.

However as we all know the Amateur Radio bands are not the place for any ideas of courting or privacy. They are the equivalent of standing in the middle of a road screaming at the top of one's voice! But, along with skeds, letters and the odd telephone call we continued on a path of getting to know each other better. Some weeks later I invited Kirsti and her daughter Ruth to Port Moresby.

It was over these couple of weeks that we were finally able to sit down (mandatory sight seeing, meeting people, excluded for the moment) and discuss some very important issues. This of course included how we felt about each other as it had become clear to us both that this was something more than friendship. We were no longer bright-eyed youngsters but we were free to make any decision we wished. It was during this visit (and confirmed some time later) that my proposal of marriage was made and accepted.

It had been a fairly hectic period for us both but, in my own case; I had to move myself lock, stock, and barrel to the Island from P.N.G. In addition, my affairs in the UK required attention as I owned property in Gillingham, Dorset. In this property, a further collection of my worldly possessions had been stored whilst I was working in P.N.G.

In settling my affairs in P.N.G. (including my formal resignation from CAA) my financial entitlements in the form of salary and bonus due were paid. I had further entitlement of leave and payment for an air fare back to my point of hire so I made arrangements to return to the UK travelling via Norfolk Island, Sydney, and London. My P.N.G. effects had also been crated and were ready for shipment to Norfolk Island. I attended a sad and fond farewell party for me held in town. My time in P.N.G. had been a wonderful experience.

Next day I boarded a flight starting my return trip to the UK and I duly arrived at Heathrow, London where it had all started. It was during this period that my family became aware of my intentions of possible re-marriage. It is to their everlasting credit that this change to be was accepted happily.

Soon, I was back home in my cottage, and over the coming few weeks, there was a great deal to do. There were family matters to deal with, and much sorting and packing of my effects. It took time but finally my boxes were all ready and duly picked up; the next time I would see them would be on Norfolk Island.

So it was that in December of this momentous year Kirsti and I were married by a Civil Service on the island. My bachelor status of some seven years had now come to an end.

In recalling this period of time I must comment on the respect and love shown to me by my own family of four over so many momentous years. Such is technology of today; regular e-mails keep us in touch. Three have travelled all the way from the UK to say hello to us both. My two eldest sons have felt the need to revisit us both and it is a special feeling. I am lucky in that I have been back to the UK several times over the years.

This whole period was mind-boggling in its various ramifications. Just for starters, for the first time in my life, I was unemployed. No work, no unemployment benefit payments, zilch! With so few options I decided to set up my own business. Registration of this business, J B Smith (Electronics) was simplicity itself and the name is still current 25 years later. On arriving back 'home' to Norfolk after the registration process had been completed, I looked at the registration document for my fledgling business and realised that things were not going to be easy.

I hated the thought of having to use rented workshop premises and having to drive to and fro to 'work' every day as I had done for years. An obvious possible solution entered my open mind. I could build my own office and workshop premises in the grounds of the house.

In those days that dreaded expression 'planning permission' was very straightforward on the Island. An application was lodged with a basic drawing of the building, inside rooms or partitions along with the material to be used on the walls, roof and so on. This also included the position of the building relative to the property boundaries, and some other factors, such as ownership of the land.

So I hired a local builder, Chris, a Norfolk Islander, and he and I set out to bring those approved drawings to reality. We set out to build my dream workshop; plenty of bench area, ample power points, loads of light, airy, space, etc. Then, an office, separate, but attached to the workshop area with plenty of space for the usual office equipment; desk, filing cabinet, shelving and a carpet on the floor. These were just a few important items that had to be considered. A telephone was of course a requirement, needing a further application.

One bright morning Chris and I stood on the large completed floor area of the building. In the meantime I had learned about the mechanics of piling, the tying of the joists and chipboard floor to these concrete anchor points called piles. At that moment I thought it might be a good idea to rent it out as a small dance floor! It was ideal for the odd quick-step, tango or whatever. It would also have made a lovely demonstration area for the 'Highland Fling'.

Joking aside, we continued to work a full day, each day, and fairly soon the wall frames were in place. Finally, vertical and ready to carry the roof frames which we built alongside the building. At last, the basic outside frame of the whole building was in place and, although we had been lucky with the weather, the sooner we got a roof on the place the better. This was another skill to be learned, and the corrugated iron roof with reflecting foil underneath was quickly in place. A sheet of iron covers a largish area very quickly.

In the meantime I had also travelled to Sydney where Ray Chambers, VK2BKD (now a SK) helped me in my search for the needed equipment and workshop tools I required. Ray had an excellent knowledge of the various sources of such items. A few days later I returned to Norfolk with more or less all of my immediate needs. HF and AF signal generators, oscilloscope, various meters and power supplies, soldering equipment, and so on.

It took further time and continuous hard work to complete the building. Chris was a wonderful tradesman, a hard worker but, more to the point, we got on very well and we had no major hassles at all. I learned a great deal from him.

The day finally came when the building, office and the new workshop were to all intents and purposes finished. The electricity and telephone had been connected to the office. I had been advertising in the local paper on a weekly basis for several weeks for repair work. The response was heartening and one of my basic rules was that any unit requiring repair had to be brought to the workshop. I just did not need the hassle of driving here and there to do this or that. Of course I made exceptions eventually, often involving someone house-bound, who had no vehicle, and so on.

As I started to do some paid repair work and continued to set up the workshop, Kirsti was getting the office area organised. Various bits and pieces were ordered and delivered. She soon had a desk, filing cabinet, typewriter, and thanks to Chris, some shelving.

Over the years that followed, I became very well known on the Island. In those days there was no TV signal to receive, but there were plenty of TV sets along with their companion VCRs. TV Programmes were copied onto tape in Australia and sent over to the Island. These tapes went the rounds on the Island and in those days, 25 years ago, the format here was BETA. It took quite a long time for the VHS format to catch on and these days BETA is defunct. I still have many tapes in the BETA format!

There was always plenty of repair work with the VCR, as the continual use of these used tapes had a nasty habit of fouling the video heads with iron oxide! These required careful cleaning, easy when you know how, but you need to be very careful if you don't. I had countless VCR's brought to me with wrecked heads courtesy of someone's over vigorous attempts with a kitchen scourer! In those days a head replacement was fairly expensive and I did many of those. Gradually I introduced the head cleaning tape, and tried to point out the errors of a DIY approach! We also entered the world of hiring out of a VCR plus TV for a reasonable weekly payment, thus providing a steady income.

During this period, after business hours, we both made steady progress towards getting a joint Amateur Radio station set up. We had both agreed that it should be within the house itself; no walks down to the workshop/office, etc. There was another, smaller building, close to the house which might have served but it still suffered from the disadvantage of having to leave the house and sit in the equivalent of a garden shed.

As my various items of personal effects arrived both from the UK and from P.N.G., I was able to make more progress. Soon a tower (more planning permission!) and a Hy-Gain beam were put in place. Various other antennas were installed and both VK9NL and VK9NS became reasonably active on the various Amateur Radio bands.

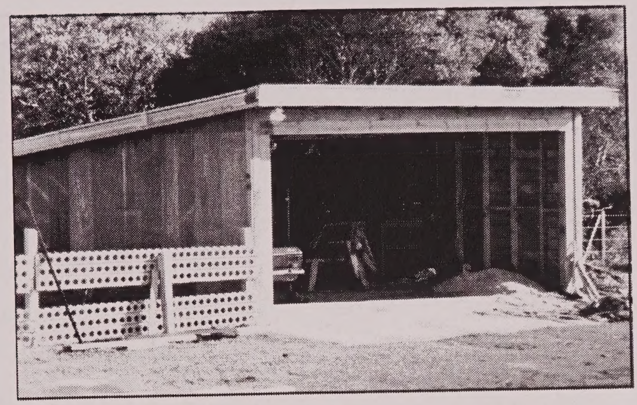
In coming to Norfolk Island from P.N.G. I already had a couple of commitments in place. One was the idea of a DXpedition to ZM7, Tokelau Islands; it was badly needed by DXers. Harry Mead, VK2BJL, Ray Chambers, VK2BKD, and I had set out to make this happen. We had even located a yacht with the capability of taking us there and back from

Apia in Western Samoa (now known as Samoa).

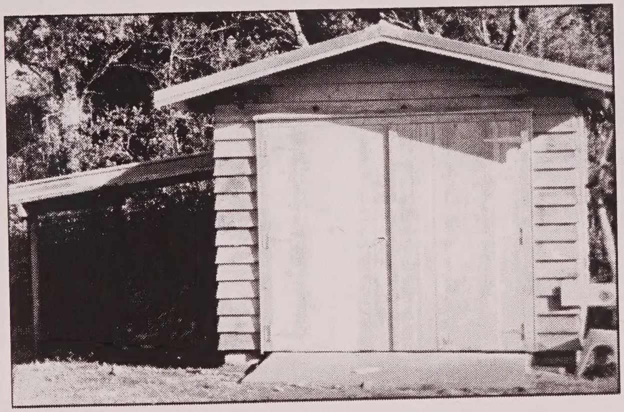
In addition, whilst in P.N.G., I had done some work towards making the possibility of a DXpedition to Heard Island a reality by forming the Heard Island DX Association (HIDXA) in Port Moresby. Heard Island was far more of a challenge and even rarer than the Tokelau Group.

One further result of my move was to change the registered address of the HIDXA from P.N.G. to our office on Norfolk Island. To deal with the Heard Island situation, HIDXA Inc., would, in due course be registered as an Incorporated Society in Tasmania, Australia.

In a surprisingly short period of time, my earlier commitment to a DXpedition to ZM7, Tokelau suddenly became a matter requiring almost immediate attention. The yacht *Banyanda,* hopefully to be chartered for the DXpedition, was to become available much earlier than previously expected. It appeared that I might be leaving Norfolk Island much quicker than previously thought.

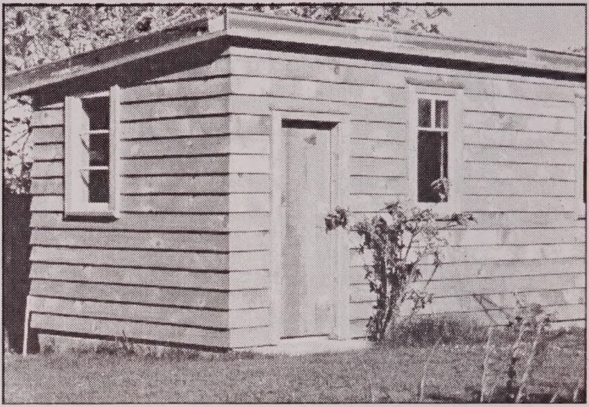


New double garage almost finished early 80's.

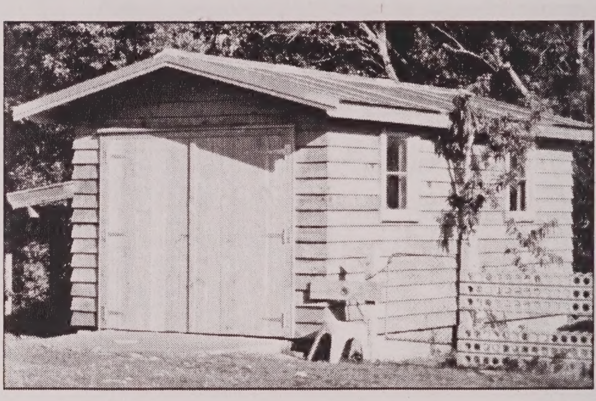


New shed and workshop area.

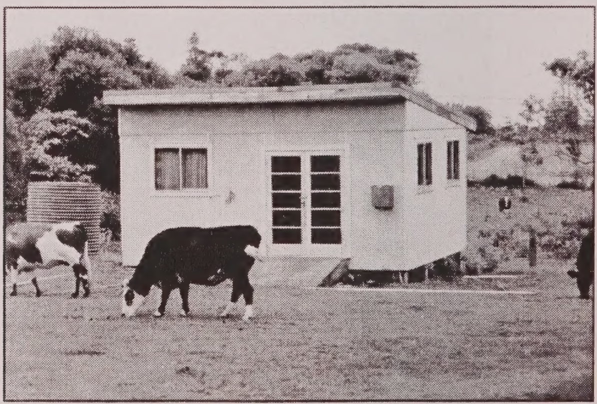
Cows have 'right of way' on Norfolk Island.



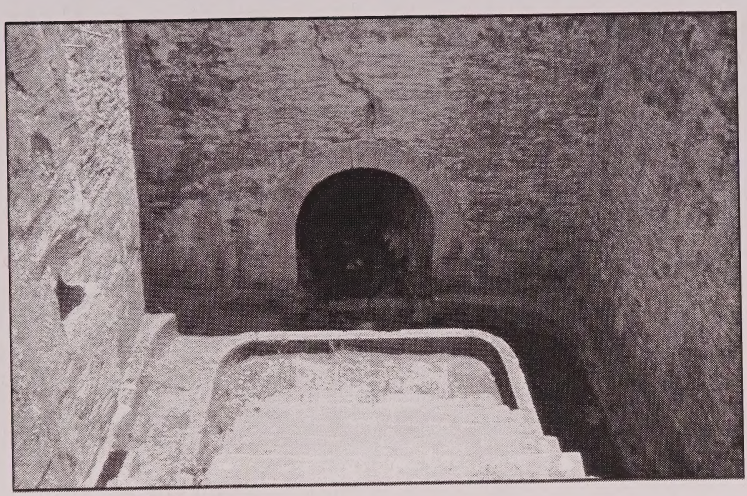
New wash house and storage area.



New workshop and shed just finished.

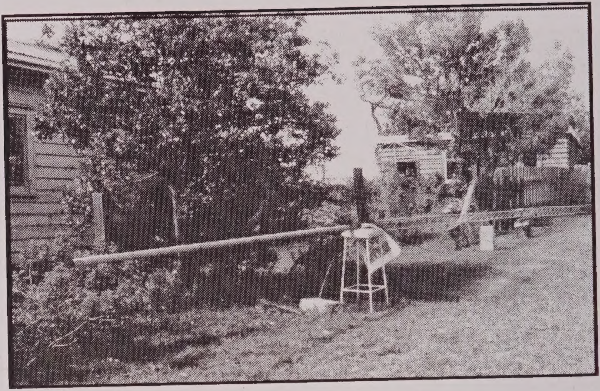


Workshop for electronic work, office area, built in 1981.



Kingston, convict era, steps to the officers bathing area.

Kingston Jetty, Phillip Island in the background, 2007.

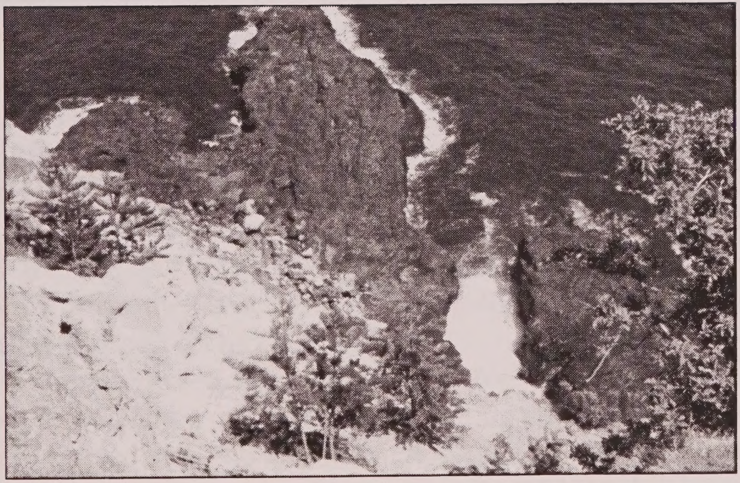


160, 80m Vertical antenna almost ready to be raised.

Raising the 160m, 80m vertical antenna.

Early testing and set up of the 40m Four Square Vertical.

Lantana, the nuisance plant (a real pest) of Norfolk Island.



Typical coast line of the Norfolk Island.

Chapter 11

DXPEDITIONS FROM NORFOLK ISLAND

Tokelau 1981

I duly arrived on Norfolk Island in 1980 to make my residency arrangements. The first few months passed very quickly as I settled into my new life with Kirsti and her daughter Ruth. Whilst I was in P.N.G., I had made a start to a couple of Amateur Radio related ideas. These involved possible DXpeditions to both Tokelau and Heard Island.

Within a few months, the first of those two ideas came sharply into focus. This was a promise made previously (whilst in P.N.G.) to Ray Chambers, VK2BKD and Harry Mead, VK2BJL that I would accompany them if they went to Tokelau on a DXpedition.

Harry had finally been able to arrange a charter with Jack, the owner of the yacht *Banyandah*. Harry and his wife Mary were Tokelau bound. The charter costs were relatively expensive, but with the addition of Ray and me, splitting up the basic costs between four people made the outlay per person more reasonable.

We had agreed to meet in Apia, Western Samoa, where the *Banyandah* would be available. In the meantime, we were based at the famous *Aggie Grey Hotel*. It was convenient in a couple of ways; comfortable and relatively near the wharf area. There we settled the charter contract and payment with the owner. Nearby the yacht *Banyandah* was tied up to the wharf, ready to leave once we had stowed our gear aboard.

I should mention here that Tokelau has three main atolls; Arafa, Fakaofe and Nukunonu. Thanks were due to the Secretary for Tokelau Affairs and the Administration Officer Nukunonu for the authorisation to visit, also to the elders and people of the atoll, who had extended the required invitation. I understood that the three atoll groups had a rotation scheme to cater for visiting foreigners.

Our first priority after arrival and settling in at our hotel in Apia was the confirmation of our Tokelau Amateur Radio licenses. This was very straightforward, requiring two actions to be taken. Firstly, it required a visit to be made to the Administration Officer for Nukunonu, in down-town Apia. Here we were each given an official paper allowing us entry to the atoll. Having received the permission paper, a trip to the Secretary of Tokelau Affairs was required. Within this office area, our Amateur Radio licenses would be issued. In this case they required copies of our VK licenses and a copy of that entry permission letter. There was also a nominal charge to pay, and soon after we each had our ZM7 licence in hand.

Each of the three operators came as a self contained unit in terms of Amateur Radio gear. Now, in licensing terms, we each held an individual callsign, my own call being ZM7JS.

As things turned out, almost everything happened as planned, and Harry, Mary, Ray and I eventually got all our gear loaded on board the yacht. There were only a couple of small glitches, mainly over food and generator fuel.

After all our paper work was cleared by quayside Customs, we departed more or less on schedule. In due course, we were clear of Apia and on our way to Nukunonu atoll. We sighted the low lying atoll of

Nukunonu a couple of days later. I do not recall much of the trip as it happened many years ago now. I do remember the weather was very good and that we were quite cramped on the yacht. Then, a few hours out of Apia, Ray discovered that all his clothes had been left behind! I can still see Ray on Nukunonu, wearing the same clothes day after day. As he was over six foot tall, there was little we could offer him by way of replacement. The outward trip was logged at some 280 n. miles which took 56 hours of sailing.

It took time to get to the anchorage area and to get ashore, using the *Banyandah* dinghy and local canoes. The population made us very welcome and helped us carry our endless packages and boxes brought from the yacht. As a result, we soon had everything ashore with no damage or breakages to our gear. There would be a change in creature comforts once we got settled on the island.

After a brief meeting and discussion with the island council, it was understood we would have the use of a large covered wooden building which had a veranda around the four walls. This would provide protection for the equipment of the three individual stations to be set up. Inside, we would be sleeping on those rubber blow-up beds used in camping (we call them 'lilos' in the UK). These proved to be invaluable in at least providing the minimum of comfort to our weary bodies after long periods of operating. There was another area set aside for cooking and eating.

Our individual stations were soon in place. I ran an ICOM 701 HF transceiver and 100 watt amplifier for the HF bands. I also carried 6m equipment with a separate antenna. I put up a wire, three band dipole which enabled me to make a start to operating. A major benefit was the fact that AC power was available and apparently from a very reliable generator source.

To share between the three stations, we had also carried a Wilson 3el HF beam with a long coax cable. This enabled us to each make use of it on a 'rotating' basis. We installed that on a 2 inch water pipe mast and running a Yagi beam made a huge difference on both transmit and receive.

A few days later I found a length (slightly bent) of one inch copper tubing, which had seen better days. On checking it out, it was around 16 foot long, ideal for a quarter wave vertical for 20m. So it ended up mounted on the beach being used in this way. Using fishing line as guys, I stood the tubing on a coconut (great insulator) and guyed it to stand up straight. I had attached a length of coax – literally by taping the inner to the tube (cleaned; of course), the braid of the coax was made off to a couple of lengths of wire, to be used as radials. I had one slightly longer piece of wire which reached the sea, the ideal ground plane. This vertical antenna worked very well and my antenna tuner handled it well, easily matching it to the transceiver. I dubbed the antenna - the 'Nukunonu Special'.

So, we gradually settled into hours of operating and in those days band conditions were wonderful. The daily routine became fairly normal; operate until one fell off the packing case seat, or the bands closed, or food was ready. Mary was our chief cook and bottle washer. She certainly looked after us, and within the limits of tin cans and primus stove, we all ate very well. Locally, Mary had been able to get coconuts, papaya and fresh fish which was available every day.

The atoll area where the village was located was not very large and during our stay each of us did our share of sight-seeing. We were always made welcome wherever we went and dealt with the many questions from the curious locals: "Where did we live?", "What was the radio thing?", "How do we like Nukunonu?"

We had one very pleasant morning 'off' work when Jack took the *Banyandah* with us and his family to another part of the atoll to swim. For obvious reasons it was not a good idea to go swimming adjacent to a village. So we motored round and had a wonderful couple of hours in a clean sparkling lagoon. It soon became much too hot as the morning warmed, up but it was a wonderful break. We all enjoyed the short trip very much and we were soon moored back at our usual anchorage area.

The Nukunonu women have an unusual idea of recreational sport. Not for them, running, jumping or javelin throwing. Not at all, their passion was cricket! The game had been introduced years ago by a missionary to the atoll and it had become an instant success.

I made a point of watching part of any game, and, frankly, it was hilarious. The women love it, with loads of remarks and laughter. 'Did you see how she missed that easy one; How did she ever get in the team?' as one was bowled out. Only joking really, but one does not really need to know a language to decode certain, everyday signs. A toss of a head here, arm up there, laughter at some point, and a scowl at another.

We all attended church on Sunday at the invitation of the community. It was all very simple, wonderfully down to earth and enjoyable. They were a truly friendly and cheerful group of people and I love the Pacific Islander voices and their songs. Today was for the singing of hymns and they sing with passion and heart. It is a beautiful sound, and each island group also has its own songs.

Often, their songs are of past events; the arrival of the white people, or a major storm, as well as with many happy events.

We did have one very rough night and part of next morning as a major storm front moved through. We were able to cover up the equipment very quickly and were sheltered to a certain extent. Luckily there was no damage and everything soon returned to normal.

Towards the end of our stay there was a meeting of the local community and we received an invitation to have a get-together the day before we were due to depart. There we were treated to a small feast of fish, chicken, rice, etc. The highlight of those few hours was the friendship shown and how they had decided to sing for us. It was a wonderful experience seeing their smiling faces, but often there were more serious moments as they changed to a different type of song. We had carried some gifts for the group and these were handed to the community with our best wishes. The elder then expressed his thanks, hoping that we had enjoyed our stay, and that we were welcome to return if we so wished.

Soon, our DXpedition drew to a close and it was time to go. Once again, after the usual carrying and stowing of our endless gear and packages the *Banyandah* was ready to depart. A great deal of cheerio's, waving, singing, went on and we were on our way.

The trip back to Apia was much rougher, probably as a result of that storm a few days previously. The time passed slowly but was un-eventful and we finally saw the coastline of Apia and later the dockside area came into view. Shortly after, we were safely tied up. The return trip was logged as 309 n. miles and it took 77 hours, so it had taken longer. Once again it was clearance through customs and then the unloading of our equipment and belongings, before we were safely back at *Aggie Grey's*. Our DXpedition was already beginning to feel like a dream, but we soon settled in again with a modicum of home comforts.

Later, after we were all cleaned up, Ray dressed decently for a change, it was time to relax downstairs, have a beer and take a lot of pleasure in how everything had gone so well. We had a wonderful evening with plenty to talk about.

Eventually I had made some 10,000 QSOs in my ZM7JS log. Harry and Ray also did well with similar totals. Our final collective QSO total was over the 30,000 mark – a very good result indeed.

Western Samoa

5W1DG/5W1DK, 2 September – 14 September 1981

During preparation for the DXpedition to Tokelau Islands with Harry, Ray and me, we had arranged to meet in Apia, Western Samoa. These days the Island is just called plain Samoa, but the *Aggie Grey Hotel* is still there.

In those days, Phil Williams, 5W1AU, was reasonably active on the Amateur Radio bands from Apia. He was a resident of the Island, had a Samoan wife named Annie, and his position as chief engineer of Air Polynesia kept him very busy. We often talked on the air and as a New Zealander he had followed our recent Tokelau operation with great interest. As an area administered by New Zealand (in the past) it had been almost impossible to get permission to go there, more so for Amateur Radio purposes.

We always seem to have plenty to talk about and he was always interested in my own P.N.G. Civil Aviation days. Some months after the Tokelau operation, he had asked why not visit W. Samoa again. Obtaining an Amateur Radio license was very straightforward - literally issued on the day of application.

Back on Norfolk Island, after the ZM7JS operation, Kirsti and I decided that a break was in order. It had really been a hectic non-stop merry-go-round since our marriage. I had been very impressed with the hotel in Apia; very comfortable and definitely 'Island Way' orientated, and their charges were reasonable. So when I mentioned my recent 'on air' chat with Phil, a short holiday in Apia sounded ideal.

In September, we duly arrived in Apia, booked into the *Aggie Grey Hotel* and settled in very quickly. We carried with us the equipment for two modest Amateur Radio stations. Phil was kind enough to meet us and say hello on our arrival in Apia. Thanks to his assistance, the customs clearance of rigs and various bits and pieces was a mere formality.

Shortly after we received the okay from Aggie Grey in person, and the following day we made a start to setting up the equipment. She had generously offered us the use of an unused room overlooking the hotel's swimming pool. 'There will be no charge for the use of this area. Close the windows, switch off the power and lock the door behind you when you shut down', were her simple rules.

Aggie Grey was a wonderful character. A legend in her own right, she was a vibrant and marvellous hostess. Nothing escaped her eyes; were the tables set properly, was that Hibiscus flower looking a bit droopy? A quick snap of the fingers, a few quiet words, and a girl would hurry back with a nice fresh flower.

The following morning Phil came to the hotel and kindly took us into town. There, Kirsti and I duly had our licenses issued, 5W1DG for myself and 5W1DK for Kirsti. The formalities were straightforward and after paying the licence fee, within 30 minutes we stepped out of the office as licensed W. Samoa radio amateurs. After a bit more basic orientation sight-seeing (this is the Post Office, there the supermarket, this is the local produce market) an hour or so later Phil drove us back to *Aggie Grey's*. He naturally had his daily work to do at the airport.

The stations were soon set up and we were able to run with individual rigs during our stay. I have no recollection of any rig problems during this period. We had visitors from time to time. Aggie would come and almost invariably had something for us; pieces of pineapple, a couple of bananas, whatever. "How are things going – you contacted London and New York – from here?" She smiled and marvelled at Kirsti and her Morse code activity.

Kirsti worked almost 100% CW, but I may have dragged her over to say hello to this ham or another.

Between us, we did quite well in terms of contacts made. The radio propagation conditions were excellent in the middle of the then current sun spot cycle.

However, there was also a need to unwind a bit and have a break from Amateur Radio. We went sightseeing and back tracked over the local market and the local shops. I really enjoy the Island markets and I had got used to them in P.N.G. They are always bustling with activity and there always seems to be something going on. One could haggle over this or that artefact which was for sale, such as beads, woven mats and wood carvings.

Annie, Phil's wife, was also really friendly and would take Kirsti in hand on shopping trips. They went swimming together at a local fresh water pool and spent many a happy hour shopping together (not something I really enjoy).

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, life went on, being waited on hand and foot and making radio contacts.

We made a decision to try and get over to American Samoa, all of 70 miles away. I particularly wanted to try and visit Larry, then KS6DV (now AH8LG) who was an old radio friend from P.N.G. days. We planned to be in Pago Pago for a whole day, just enough time for a quick look around. It was Phil (again) who alerted us that a one day (there and back) trip was possible. So, one morning, by arrangement we arrived at the airport ready for the flight. Kirsti recalls that there was a problem with the door of the airplane! It could not be locked properly, so our flight over to Apia took place at 2,000 feet; no pressurization required – or possible!

When we arrived in Pago Pago, unfortunately Larry was not there but was over on Canton Island. However we met his wife, Uti, and said the usual hello's and she promised to pass our regards to Larry. It was she who suggested a couple of 'must do' things whilst we were in Pago. One of which we both remember best was a trip across the large harbour area on a cable car. This system had been installed years previously. It was used to enable a TV station to be set up on top of a mountain on the other side of the harbour. The station gave excellent coverage, but, naturally, it had to be manned and maintained, hence this spectacular method of getting up there reasonably quickly – literally a matter of a few minutes!

The trip over was a glorious experience with a wide panoramic view of down town Pago Pago and the huge harbour below. On arrival at the other side, we met the TV technicians who were very friendly and showed us both around. It was all very interesting and we had a chat and a coke with them.

All too soon, it was time to head back. It was the view over the harbour which Kirsti and I really learned to love. It was quite magnificent as the cable car firmly stuck half way across, swaying gently in the breeze. It seemed to go on for an age and we appreciated the unscheduled mystery stop which seemed to have been made just for the two of us.

When we finally got back to the other end, all was explained. There had been a power outage and we received profuse apologies from the very embarrassed operator!

Then, after a hurried shortened look around downtown Pago Pago, it was time to leave. No hitches this time and the short-haul flight on that same plane soon had us back in Apia. A few minutes later our arrival formalities were over, and our hotel soon offered some peace and quiet. Something we needed, as our experience had been wonderful of course, but it had definitely been 'one of those days' with quite a bit of hanging around.

During our last couple of days in Apia, at one of the evening dinners, it was announced that Aggie Grey would dance for the hotel guests. We had heard about this possibility and in due course, Aggie got up and headed for the stage area. The diners were treated to a 30 minute session of Samoan music, singing and Aggie giving a solo performance. She was really magnificent and I could see that she enjoyed entertaining. She received a warm and heartfelt response from us all.

And then it was time for us both to get a move on. Rigs had to be disconnected and packed; antenna wires taken down and rolled up. Finally, the radio room, so kindly lent us by Aggie, was empty of our equipment. We both set to and gave the room a last minute tidy up and were shortly after back in our room. There we made a start to packing everything ready for our departure.

The following morning we were at the airport, starting our trip back to Norfolk Island. It had been an enjoyable 10 days which had passed all too quickly.

Amateur Radio in East Malaysia
Kuching, Sarawak. August, 1982.

In Amateur Radio DX terms, 9M8, East Malaysia was relatively rare and often represented by just one or two resident amateurs. I had been in contact with Paul, 9M8PW on a fairly frequent basis by Amateur Radio. Paul was an English minister in the Anglican Church, based in Kuching, the capitol city. On air, we seemed to have a few things in common; love of the Far East, its people and customs. He had been around the area for many years (I recalled speaking to him whilst in P.N.G.) and Kuching was now his current assignment. At some point in one of these sessions, he extended an open invitation to Kirsti and me; why not visit us in Kuching?

After the usual, endless questions associated with foreign travel; visa, how to get there and back, and Amateur Radio licensing, Kirsti and I decided that a visit to Sarawak would be great. Neither of us had been there before, and we quickly learned that obtaining a visa was routine. Travel to and from Kuching was possible, on a more or less daily basis, by fast jet airline.

Amateur Radio licensing proved to be slightly harder, but when I mentioned that I had been previously licensed in Singapore, things were suddenly easier. In due course, we were promised that licensing would be no problem. 9M8JS had been allocated for my use and 9M8NL for Kirsti's use. So it seemed that all was well and after a short delay our licenses were duly received on Norfolk Island.

There was one other bonus. Paul had generously suggested that we could use existing accommodation within the Anglican Church Hostel compound. He and his wife lived nearby and they would help all they could to make the trip a success.

Eventually, we both arrived in Kuching with our radio equipment and our guest Amateur Radio licenses in place. Paul met us at the airport and we had no problem with clearing our equipment through customs. We soon arrived at the Anglican Church compound where our accommodation was ready with a bed/sitting room, kitchen and bathroom. It was ideal. Shortly after the introductions and general welcome, Kirsti and I were on our own making a start to unpacking.

The accommodation was self contained in every way, and with another bonus in the form of a flat roof with a safety fence in place. It was ideal for our purposes and the view over Kuching was stunning!

We had brought a small 3 el. Beam along, and Paul had said it would be easily installed on that roof. We needed a length of 2 inch water pipe to act as a mast. This product was usually readily available in 20 foot lengths and ideal for antenna work.

Basically, it meant going in to town and searching for a source. The local ironmonger was a good place to start, and so, after a few pleasantries, I popped the question: "I need a length of 2 inch galvanised water pipe, do you stock this item?" Silence reigned. Was that an uncomfortable look? If he did have the item, then he seemed to be reluctant to sell it to me. No Asian likes to be put in an awkward position and so we looked around in several possible areas in the shop and finally in his yard I found what I was looking for. After our purchase and still uncertain about the shop-keeper's apparent reluctance, we headed off, carrying it between us. I wonder what they thought of Kirsti and me walking through Kuching carrying a 20 foot length of 2 inch water pipe! Well, just maybe they were not exactly laughing, but they were certainly smiling.

The water pipe mystery was solved later during our stay whilst out on one of our tourist excursions. At the Police Museum, on display, were several home made terrorist mortars and home made bombs! They were all made from 2-inch water pipe! So the mystery of the apparent reluctance to sell this item was explained.

Once back in the compound, with the help of the gardener and caretaker we installed the beam, attached to the water pipe, and soon everything was in place on the roof. We opted for the usual 'Armstrong' method of beam rotation! I set up a simple direction indicator and the beam could be moved in any required direction. It was then made fast with a short length of rope.

Once the rig was set up, we were ready to make a start. There would be plenty of CW operating as this was Kirsti's domain. Gradually, both 9M8JS and 9M8NL were active and the contact totals rose steadily.

We had a steady week of hard work and trouble-free operating. We had plenty of sight-seeing and get-togethers with Paul and his wife; everything seemed plain sailing. Unfortunately this situation was about to end!

I was on the roof, making off the end of our new 40m dipole when there was an almighty crash and a flash of lightning and I had the distinct impression that it was very close. My guardian angel was certainly on my side that day, but in protecting me, could do nothing about the severe power surge in the building. I headed down stairs, 'shaken but not stirred', to find Kirsti in a very worried state. We were both obviously okay, but there had also been a loud bang in the shack area and a flash from out of our DC power supply running from the AC power line. The quickest of checks showed that it had been damaged quite severely.

Despite several attempts to repair the fault, there was little I could do. These 'switch mode' power supplies have a major weakness. They do not like AC line surges from any source, and in particular a lightning strike.

Fortunately, we were able to hire a 12V car battery and a charger unit. Luckily, the rig itself was okay, but our small battery would not allow sufficient current to obtain the full 100 watt output from the rig. Paul kindly lent us his linear amplifier which we drove with our 50 watts, and we were back in business.

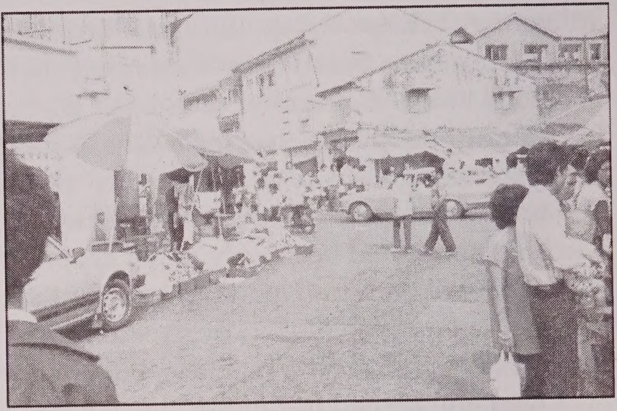
We both had one more episode which remains in our minds, even today. There was an outbreak of the deadly Dengue fever virus in town. We had won a major battle against the daily waves of mosquitoes. Fly spray and mosquito coils stopped them, but they always had back-up 'kamikazes' homing in.

Dengue Fever was bad news so eventually our accommodation had to be sprayed under the rules of the local administration. The spread of the fever had to be limited if at all possible. You have probably heard of 'fog spraying.' Imagine this in our accommodation area and shack area. We could hardly see each other across the room!

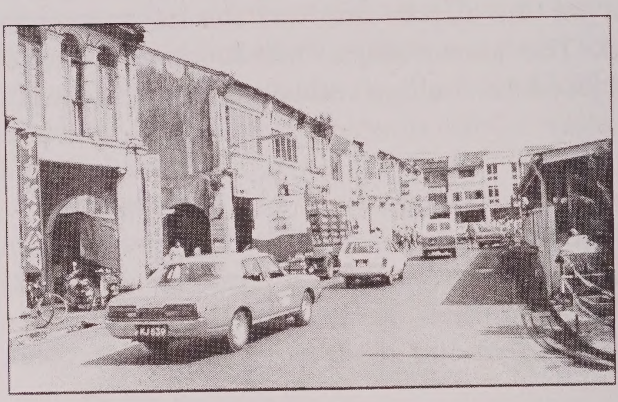
Kirsti and I managed to squeeze in several outings to Kuching. The Museum in town must rate as world class with its large variety of exhibits - even having a cave with skulls and a Dyak native village showing the sort of buildings they built outside the city. Incidentally the museum was built in the late 1890's under the direction of an early White Rajah of the Brooke dynasty. The architecture was based on a Victorian building in England. We both loved the market area with all the stalls and the fascinating people, a real live and vibrant community, always smiling. We both thoroughly enjoyed our stay. It had been most generous of Paul and his wife to invite us to Kuching and it had been easy to get around the area.

Whilst we were in Kuching we heard some good news. We had been successful in our search for a vessel suitable for a journey to Heard Island - but a contract had to be arranged and signed fairly quickly.

All too soon it was time to dismantle and pack up our gear and head for the airport and our return journey to Norfolk Island. The joint 9M8JS/9M8NL operation had gone well with just a few bumps and bangs along the way.

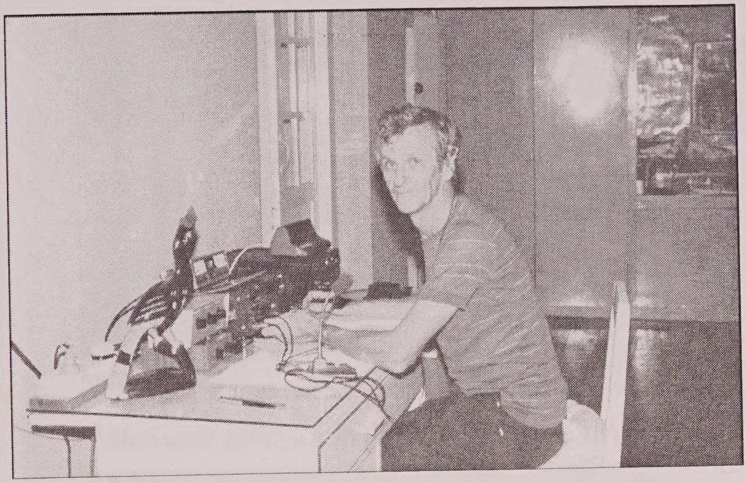


Quite busy in down town Kuching, Sarawak.



Plenty of traffic around in Kuching, Sarawak.

Jim, 9M8JS in Kuching, Sarawak.



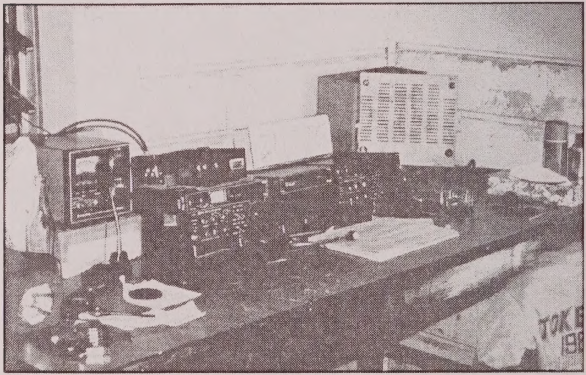
Jim, 9M8JS operating in Kuching, Sarawak.

JALAN DATUK AJIBAH ABOL
MOSQUE ROAD

Kirsti, 9M8NL, Kuching, Sarawak.

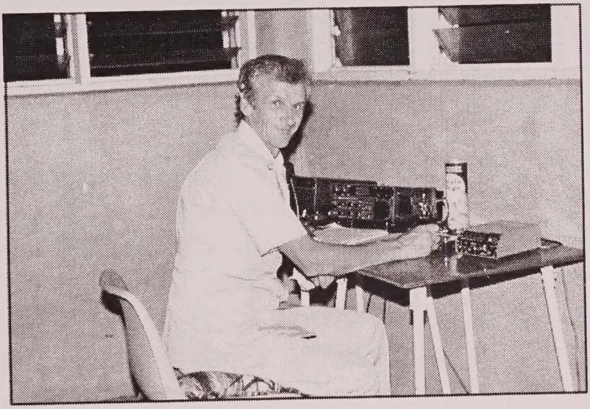
Kirsti, 9M8NL operating in Kuching, Sarawak.

6m and HF Beams used on Tokelau. ZM7JS, etc.

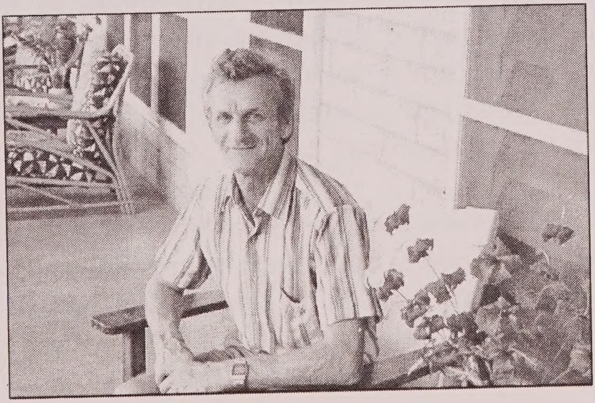


ZM7JS station on the veranda of building. Tokelau.

Aggie Grey hotel, W. Samoa. Shack in the top area.



Jim, 5W1DG operating at the Aggie Grey hotel.



Jim, 5W1DG, Aggie Grey hotel, W. Samoa.

Chapter 12

AUSTRALIAN CALL AREAS VK1-VK0

In this part of the world, you can buy novelty maps, which show Australia and Pacific areas at the top of the map instead of the more usual 'down under', approach of conventional mapping. On normal maps everyone knows that north is top and south is bottom, right? But of course this is completely arbitrary.

Over the years I have come to regard the Pacific area as my place of abode and Europe often seems a life-time away. I have gradually started to put my own northern European orientated geography more and more to one side. Being resident on Norfolk Island for many years has pushed me into the VK, ZL and Pacific sphere of the world mentally as well as actually.

In this chapter I will take you on a wide, sweeping tour of the VK call areas of Australian Amateur Radio, from Norfolk Island in the east, to Heard Island deep in the Southern Indian Ocean, far to the south-west. By the time we are back on Norfolk Island, the total distance covered will be many thousands of miles or more common these days - kilometres.

The Australian callsigns are based on a rigid structure of the basic VK Australian prefix, followed by a number which designates the state or area of operation. Other prefixes (for example VI and AX) are available for special activities. These prefixes are followed by a unique suffix of 2 or 3 letters which are issued in sequence. As will be seen later, this structure is changing to meet new types of licence, e.g. the novice license. On mainland Australia the system remains intact within the VK1-VK8 areas. In writing this I am mindful that I have never resided on mainland Australia for any length of time; however, over the years I have visited every state and many of the external areas.

Let us now look at the VK callsign structure. Mainland Australia consists of several individual states. Each state has its own basic government and its own prime minister. The Federal government, based in Canberra, has jurisdiction over all Australia. It is often difficult for an outsider to come to grips with the state system. There are wide differences in the state laws, and each is protective towards its own outlook.

The callsign structure of the States is as follows;

VK1	AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	ACT
VK2	NEW SOUTH WALES	NSW
VK3	VICTORIA	VIC
VK4	QUEENSLAND	QLD
VK5	SOUTH AUSTRALIA	SA
VK6	WESTERN AUSTRALIA	WA
VK7	TASMANIA	TAS
VK8	NORTHERN TERRITORY	NT

The total radio amateur population is approximately 16,000. The number covers all licenses; novice, full and limited callsign holders.

The External Territories and areas utilise the VK9 and VK0 prefix as follows. VK9 is allocated to External

Territories and VK0 used for Antarctic areas. Radio Amateurs in these two areas are rare.

VK9L	LORD HOWE ISLAND
VK9N	NORFOLK ISLAND
VK9X	CHRISTMAS ISLAND (INDIAN OCEAN)
VK9C	COCOS (KEELING) ISLAND
VK9M	MELLISH REEF
VK9W	WILLIS ISLAND
VK0	ANTARCTIC CONTINENT
VK0	HEARD ISLAND
VK0	MACQUARIE ISLAND

Responsibility for Amateur Radio licensing has been invested in several departments in the past. An example is the Department of Transport and Communications (DOTC). Australia runs an efficient system and has reciprocal arrangements with many countries. These days the new name is the Australian Communications and Media Authority and it is still based in Canberra.

As I write this, the state system is jealously guarded with each state being responsible for issuing licenses within the state and for its own Radio Inspector system. Of course, the state system acknowledges licensing conditions and decisions made at Federal level in Canberra. These days, issue of a license, renewal reminders, and collection of licensing fees is computer controlled. There are to my mind several strange outlooks - strange to an outsider that is!

As an example, a few years ago they allocated the VK9AA -VK9ZZ series for short-term licenses for use in the external Territories. As a result the VK9N, VK9L convention was not followed, VK9AD being issued to my son during his visit to Norfolk Island. Later, a re-issued VK9N call was issued to a visiting G radio amateur who only stayed a few days on the Island.

It also seems strange that on moving to, say, Queensland (VK4) from NSW (VK2) on retirement, one has to make application for a VK4 license and then have to relinquish the VK2 call (even if it has been held for 30 years).

The USA, for example, has long ago ceased the rigid number structure of a callsign/location. Once an Amateur Radio license has been issued, it may be used in any State or Territory.

In Australia, old callsigns are often re-issued with the two-letter suffix call being in particular demand. Re-issue of old callsigns is not usually done in the UK and elsewhere. One is able to tell how long someone has been licensed if you know the callsign structure. This is not the case in Australia.

The population of Australia is about 18 million and growing fast. All mainland VK call areas are, of course, populated. Certain states have a much higher population than others. In Amateur Radio terms it is often difficult to work a VK1, VK7 or a VK8. A glance at the numbers against each state in the table explains the reason. Having travelled in and around Australia, I now better understand the sheer size of this continent. In the Northern Territory, Alice Springs is in the heart of Australia, and is miles from anywhere. With a relatively small population there are usually few active radio amateurs. Far to the north, Darwin is in the tropics and, again, has a small Amateur Radio population. Both the VK6 and the VK8 call areas are special to the DXer in another way as they are in Zone 29 of the *CQ* Magazine Worked All Zones Award (*WAZ*).

The Wireless Institute of Australia (WIA) is the oldest Amateur Radio society in the world. It even 'pips' the RSGB by a year. Fewer than fifty percent of the Australian amateurs are members of the WIA. Here again, the organisation is divided in a sense by the state structure, with each state having its own president and council.

Membership dues are collected at the state level, and a portion allocated to Federal level. This fund supports the WIA monthly magazine, *Amateur Radio*. In many ways, it can be seen to be a tremendous waste of resources for a small group of radio amateurs. There is a great deal of duplication and triplication of effort.

However, it is difficult to see how the state system could be integrated into an overarching 'Australian Society'. An honest attempt is being made to update the whole structure of the WIA. It is timely, as membership has been falling steadily for many years. The Federal office sometimes appears to be out of touch with the membership. There have been too many instances of the left hand not knowing what the right is doing. In many cases, at state level, members are a law unto themselves.

A total Australian representation is difficult to implement, as a result of the immense distances involved. It is hard for a VK6 radio amateur in Perth to relate with the Federal office in Victoria, some 2,000 miles to the East.

The radio amateur in Australia is lucky in many respects. It is not a 'back of the woods' area; for example, there is an excellent component and electronics market in place. One may readily purchase all of the usual electronic bits and pieces and much of the material is manufactured in Australia. There are several good Amateur Radio outlets and these outlets usually have an agent in each state. There is a major source of aluminium tubing and, similar to many other countries, the equipment market is dominated by the latest 'all-singing, all-dancing' Japanese transceiver. Local manufacturing is confined mostly to antennas, power supplies and linear amplifiers. In the commercial area, there is a thriving computer industry and there are many solid achievements in the communications field by Australian engineers.

The external Territories are of great interest to the DXer as these areas are often separate DXCC Countries. Perhaps few words on each would be of interest. As I am here right now, Norfolk Island, VK9N is a good place to start. Let us begin the tour.

NORFOLK ISLAND VK9N

This tiny Island, with a population of around 1,800, is a mere speck of land measuring 3 miles by 5 miles. It is about 800 miles East of Australia, about 700 miles north-west from New Zealand, and about 700 miles, to the south of New Caledonia.

The Island is isolated, but there is a good airline service on an almost daily basis from mainland Australia. There are also flights from to and from New Zealand. In addition, there is an adequate sea freight service, managed on a month by month basis. One month the vessel arrives from Australia, the next from New Zealand. Our Telecom facilities are excellent.

It is said that Norfolk is an Island paradise and many agree with that view. The island depends on tourism which is a fickle game. The island's economy goes through a boom and bust cycle on a regular basis. It is better not to be too dependent on this source of income, but in many cases there is no choice.

As previously mentioned, Norfolk Island was famous, or infamous, as a penal colony. The remains of those days are the finest collection of Georgian buildings in the Southern hemisphere. They have been preserved with great care and they are well worth visiting. The main prison area is an exception in that considerable damage has been done to this area over the years. The wall surrounding the total prison area is intact, complete with the 'hangman steps' on one wall which faces the sea, but the buildings inside the wall have been dismantled.

WILLIS ISLAND VK9W

Tiny Willis Island is some 300 miles off the northern coast of Queensland in the Coral Sea and about 1,200 miles to the north-west of Norfolk Island. It is usually occupied by a small group of meteorologists. (It is noted here that in 2007, most of this facility is now controlled remotely.) Being in the cyclone area, the Met facility is able to provide valuable data for mainland Australia. It was always a matter of luck whether the (then) current Met group had a radio amateur in the team. There have been times when activity on Willis Island was followed by a long period of inactivity.

Since Willis Island qualifies as a separate DXCC country, it follows that this island is always in high demand. The stay of the Met team on Willis is limited to six months at which point a change-over of all staff takes place.

A few years ago, I organised a small DXpedition to Willis Island and this story appears within the covers of this book. I am able to vouch for the fishing, snorkelling, sea-shells and bird life to be found in the area. It offers all visitors to the island a stay which will be something to remember.

NB: At certain times of the year, eating of reef fish is not permitted as some variety of fish become highly toxic. The exact reason is not known.

MELLISH REEF VK9M

This small reef is about 500 miles to the south-west from Willis Island and a few hundred miles east of the Queensland Coast. It is unoccupied, except for the thousands of sea birds which have their breeding grounds on the reef. True or false, it is said that one smells the reef long before it comes onto view. Once again, being a DXCC country makes it known to the radio amateur interested in

DXing. From time to time DXpeditions are mounted to put a party on the reef for a few days. It is always in great demand when activated. Over the years, there have been several DXpeditions, but it is in constant demand, is always a difficult one to activate and the hardy DXers are in for a tough old stay.

LORD HOWE ISLAND VK9L

We return to Norfolk Island for a short stop-over, before continuing our journey. Lord Howe Island, located some 400 miles to the west of Norfolk, is much smaller than Norfolk Island. The island was settled over 150 years ago and the small population of about 60 islanders has a unique situation of residency. The island, for administrative purposes, is considered to be part of NSW and until recent times used the VK2 (NSW) prefix.

There are also a number of unusual circumstances on the island. They have a matriarchal society in place and all are able to trace their lineage back to when the island was first settled. There is no freehold land; it all belongs to the Crown. Declared a National Park many years ago, there are no new settlers, no new migration and, with only one recent notable exception, no new people have been permitted to stay. The government is in an awkward position of not being able to kick everyone out! As a result, the community is a close-knit society. Similar to other areas, Lord Howe is also dependent on tourism to this beautiful Island. Two high mountains of Gower (875m) and Lidgbird (777m) dominate the island, and nearby, Balls Pyramid is a real freak of nature.

Amateur Radio has always been minimal. For a long time there have only been one or two resident amateurs, and both were able to hide themselves under the blanket of using a VK2 (NSW) callsign. Dick, VK2AGT, was perhaps the best example. Since Lord Howe Island counts as a separate country in DXCC terms, an application was made and accepted to allocate the VK9L prefix to the Island. Dick was then able to change his callsign to VK9LH and the island is always in great demand on the amateur bands.

MACQUARIE ISLAND VK0

As we now travel SSW through the roaring forties, into the screaming fifties, to 55 degrees South, Macquarie Island is coming into view dead ahead. For many years this island was part of the determined elephant seal, fur seal, and the whale extermination programme by man, carried out in the name of a barrel of oil, not to mention profit.

These far off days have gone, long ago, but there are many reminders on the island of those times. A strong feral cat population survives and continues to do a great deal of damage to the bird life. Continued attempts have been made to exterminate the cats, but there are far too many inaccessible spots for total eradication to be possible.

These days, the island carries 'year round' residents in the shape of scientists and technicians from the Australian Antarctic Division (ANARE) whose HQ is in Hobart, Tasmania. Studies are carried out on the breeding habits of the elephant seal, fur seal, and bird population. Other studies into radio propagation, the earth's magnetic field and the ozone layer are all carried out on this rugged and remote outpost.

With all this activity, the chances of working Macquarie Island in an Amateur Radio sense are usually good. With a large party wintering there and with the substantial facilities on the Island, there is often a radio amateur in the group. He might be the weatherman or radio technician and this does tend to keep Macquarie Island available on the amateur bands.

As time moves along, more and more of the communications with mainland Australia are being carried out via satellite links. The requirement for HF links and HF activity is disappearing quickly.

ANTARCTICA VK0

The name Antarctica conjures up an image of endless ice and freezing winds, often of blizzard strength. As we head further south-west from Macquarie Island it becomes impossible for us not to bump into the vast continent of Antarctica. Australia has laid claim to a vast area and maintains a presence in three distinct areas; Casey Base at 110 degrees east, Davis Base at 80 degrees east, and Mawson Base at 60 degrees east. All bases are below 65 degrees south. Here, again, the bases are manned all the year round with annual changes of staff.

Scientists continue to have dozens of projects, many similar to those carried out on Macquarie Island. There is great interest in the mineral wealth under the ice, of course. Deep core samples of the ice give valuable data on the atmosphere of earth thousands of years ago, from the gasses remaining locked and compressed in the ice, deep under the surface. En route to these Antarctic bases at change-over time, marine scientists' studies reveal krill count, iceberg size, and many other facts of interest to the scientific world.

There is no shortage of volunteers to be part of the ANARE Scientific programmes. As a result, Australian Antarctica (to coin a phrase) is usually available on the Amateur Radio bands. With a fair degree of certainty, at least one of the bases will have a radio amateur in the team. As all DXers know, the whole of Antarctica is one DXCC country, using the terms of presence on the continent; no country has sovereign rights of any area.

HEARD ISLAND VK0

Our quick journey overland, westward, across Australian Antarctica, via the three bases, has us now heading out to sea on a north-east course from Mawson Base. Heard Island is a mere 1600 miles away lying deep in the Southern Indian Ocean. If the weather is kind, the island is readily found. Its actual position at about 53 degrees south and 73 degrees east is accurate on all charts. The highest point of the island is the still active volcano Big Ben, which is 9000 feet (3000m) high. In fact, Big Ben is the highest point in all of Australia and its Territories.

In the same era as Macquarie, Heard Island also witnessed the slaughter of its wild life. The elephant seal and the fur seal populations came close to extinction. When the seals ran out, the penguin suffered the same fate, as it was pressed into service, again for those thousands of barrels of oil which made many rich. Only a few inaccessible beaches held a few of their remaining numbers in precarious safety. It was those survivors which have provided the breeding stock for today's numbers.

Heard Island is majestic and, once again, now abounds with birds, elephant seals, fur seals and penguins in relative abundance. These days they all seem hardly the worse for the experience, but it was a close thing. There are many reminders of those days gone by. In one area, one can find staves, rusting barrel hoops and parts of lids. Put together they are then ready to be filled with oil. The stone built store building of the sealing era is derelict. It is a tough climate and even this sturdy building could not withstand the fury of some of the storms in these southern oceans.

In an Amateur Radio sense, Heard Island is probably the hardest one to work; it is not often active, the island is visited officially in-frequently. In the late forties and early fifties it was different as Heard Island was often manned on a 'round the year' basis.

With luck, a radio man was a requirement in the team and he was often a radio amateur. In 1992, after many years of no official presence, a small group of ANARE scientists wintered on the island. The weather otherwise confines any visits to the few short summer months around December, January, and February of each year. The word 'summer' is used in its widest possible sense. It is one of the highlights of my life that I visited Heard Island, leading a multi National DXpedition back in 1983.

COCOS (KEELING) VK9C (also VK9Y)

Our journey back to the Australian mainland now takes us on another long sea voyage to VK9C, Cocos (Keeling). The Island is 3000 miles to the north-east, and I agree, it will certainly be a roundabout way to go. Nevertheless, it suits our purpose and reminds us of the distances involved. This low-lying atoll of a group of several islands lies just a few feet above sea level and in the past was missed very easily, when arriving by sea.

Clunies-Ross discovered the atoll and realised its potential. He returned with a group of Malays and founded his dynasty, based on the coconut palm and copra. At one time the atoll was the private kingdom of the Clunies-Ross family. Those days have gone and the Cocos Malays, the descendants of the original group, now have a measure of independence. Their council has a major say in the running of the island affairs. Islanders are able to apply for an Australian passport and may visit the Australian mainland. Many have left for good, drawn by the lure of a better life which a steady job and income brings.

For a visitor to Cocos (Keeling), it is hard to understand why anyone would want to leave this beautiful atoll with its ever-changing lagoon. The colour of the water displays a kaleidoscope of a never ending change, ranging from white to deep purple. The coral sand on the beaches is almost pure white. The atoll however is in the cyclone area; vicious storms do occur, and damage to the fragile coconut plantations is often considerable. A recent addition to the island was a Cyclone Proof Shelter built at the cost of several million dollars.

Amateur Radio activity has always been sporadic and was often the result of one of the Australian government's CAA staff being a radio amateur. A good example would be the radio technician who takes care of the airport facilities and Navigational Aids. On occasions, one of these technicians would be a radio amateur. In recent years, several DXpeditions have activated the island and, as a result, many DXers have this one worked and confirmed.

I have activated Cocos (Keeling) on two occasions, using the callsign VK9YS which I held for several years. (NB: For many years VK9Y was the prefix allocation used for Cocos Keeling).

CHRISTMAS ISLAND VK9X

It is time to change to a plane as our means of travel; it will be faster and much more comfortable. If we now depart Cocos (Keeling), and head off to the east, we will soon sight Christmas Island, some 600 miles away and make a safe landing. This is a large island, also with a history. For many years this island was also linked to the Clunies-Ross family, as they held concessions for the phosphate mining. The island's recent history revolves around the mining of rich phosphate, until recently a lucrative business. To mine the deposits, the Phosphate Company hired foreign labour, as there was no resident population of 'Christmas Islanders', ready to be pressed into service.

As a result, workers from Hong Kong and other countries had been recruited over the years. The majority of the population of the island is connected with the phosphate industry; there are many of Chinese descent on the island. Although many have worked there for many years, they have no claim to the island. Until recent times they resided in company housing, shopped at the company stores, and sent their kids to company schools. They never had the possibility of residency as, once again, there is no freehold land. One was unable to immigrate to Christmas Island, open up a business and build a house.

These days' things are changing. For one thing, the phosphate has run out and world demand has lessened. The workers, in many cases, have no desire to return 'home', as for many, the island *is* home. Therefore, there are problems, with the Australian government slowly taking back control of the island from the Phosphate Company. There were plans for a casino and a new tourist industry but it came to naught. These days it is an off-shore detention centre to deal with the illegal immigrant (the so called 'boat people') problem.

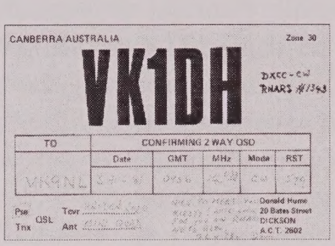
As a rule, Christmas Island was available to radio amateurs on a regular basis. Several of the communications technicians lived and worked on Christmas Island for many years. The island had an active radio club with its own premises, own station equipment, and its own callsign, VK9XI. All of the older DXers will have a VK9XI QSL card in their DXCC collection. These days it is relatively rare, there have been a few DXpedition style activities.

It is now time to take the 1,600-mile flight back to Perth, in Western Australia, via a short stop at Cocos (Keeling). In Perth we will make our official entry back into Australia, complete visa requirements and clear customs formalities.

Tomorrow morning, on leaving Perth and with a measure of luck, there will be a stop at Alice Springs, near the famous Ayers Rock (Uluru) deep in the Australian outback. The flight will then continue on its way to complete the 2000 miles to Sydney.

If the weather is fine over Norfolk Island, we would then be able to leave Sydney next morning. The two-hour flight will have us back on Norfolk Island, skimming low past Philip Island, a few miles to the south, before landing.

It has been an exhausting trip, and I am ready for a break. How about you?



CANBERRA AUSTRALIA Zone 30

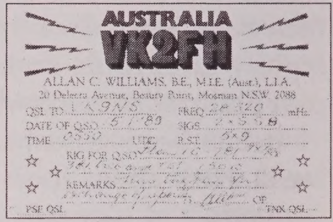
VK1DH

DXCC - CW
RNARS #1343

TO	CONFIRMING 2 WAY QSO				
	Date	GMT	MHz	Mode	RST
VK9NL	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	CW	[illegible]

Pse QSL Tnx
Tcvr
Ant

Donald Hume
20 Bates Street
DICKSON
A.C.T. 2602

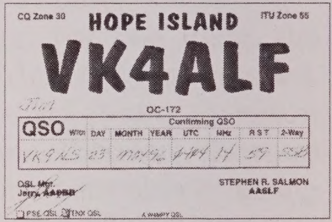


AUSTRALIA
VK2FH

ALLAN C. WILLIAMS. B.E., M.I.E. (Aust.), L.I.A.
20 Delecta Avenue, Beauty Point, Mosman N.S.W. 2088

QSL TO VK9NS FREQ 28.320 mHz.
DATE OF QSO 5/1/89 SIGS 2 × 5 5 8
TIME 0530 UTC. R.S.T. 5×9
RIG FOR QSO
REMARKS

PSE QSL TNX QSL



CQ Zone 30 HOPE ISLAND ITU Zone 55

VK4ALF

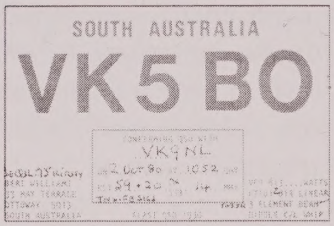
OC-172

QSO With	Confirming QSO						
	DAY	MONTH	YEAR	UTC	MHz	RST	2-Way
VK9NS	23	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	14	57	SSB

QSL Mgr.
Jerry

STEPHEN R. SALMON
AA5LF

☐ PSE QSL ☒ TNX QSL

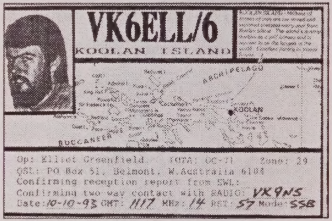


SOUTH AUSTRALIA

VK5BO

VK9NL
2 Oct 90 1052
59 + 20 14
TNX FB SIGS

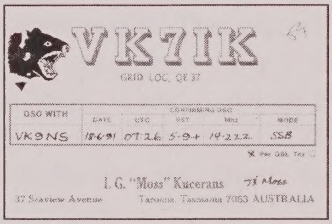
BERT WILLIAMS
33 HAY TERRACE
OTTOWAY 5013
SOUTH AUSTRALIA



VK6ELL/6
KOOLAN ISLAND

ARCHIPELAGO
KOOLAN
BUCCANEER

Op: Elliot Greenfield IOTA: OC-71 Zone: 29
QSL: PO Box 51, Belmont, W.Australia 6104
Confirming reception report from SWL:
Confirming two-way contact with RADIO: VK9NS
Date: 10-10-93 GMT: 1117 MHz: 14 RST: 57 Mode: SSB

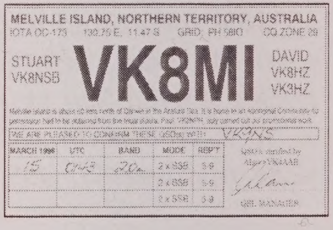


VK7IK

GRID LOC. QE 37

QSO WITH	DATE	UTC	RST	MHz	MODE
VK9NS	18-6-91	07.26	5-9+	14.222	SSB

I. G. "Moss" Kucerans 73 Moss
37 Seaview Avenue Taroona, Tasmania 7053 AUSTRALIA



MELVILLE ISLAND, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA
IOTA OC-173 130.75 E. 11.47 S GRID: PH 58IO CQ ZONE 29

STUART
VK8NSB

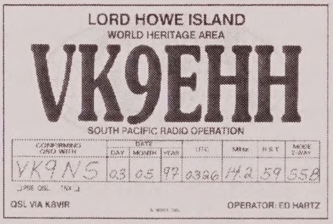
VK8MI

DAVID
VK8HZ
VK3HZ

WE ARE PLEASED TO CONFIRM THESE QSO(s) WITH VK9NS

MARCH 1998	UTC	BAND	MODE	REPT
15	0742	20m	2 x SSB	59
			2 x SSB	59
			2 x SSB	59

QSL MANAGER



LORD HOWE ISLAND
WORLD HERITAGE AREA

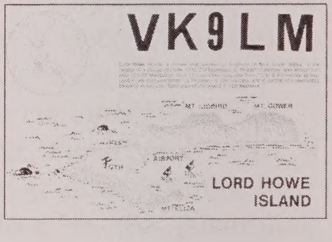
VK9EHH

SOUTH PACIFIC RADIO OPERATION

CONFIRMING QSO WITH	DATE			UTC	MHz	RST	MODE 2-WAY
	DAY	MONTH	YEAR				
VK9NS	03	05	97	0326	14.2	59	SSB

☐ PSE QSL TNX ☐

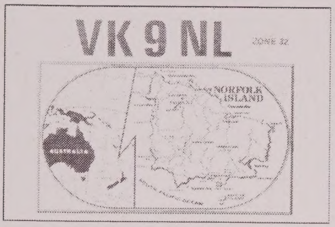
QSL VIA K8VIR OPERATOR: ED HARTZ

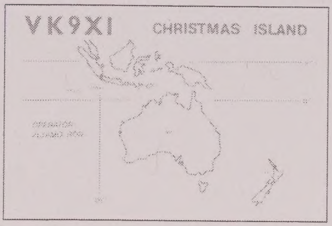


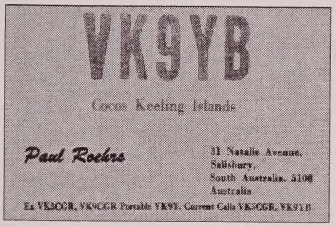
VK9LM

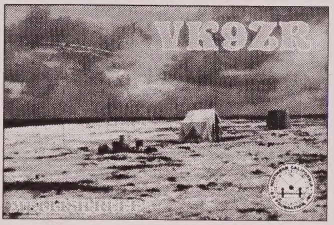
MT. LIDGBIRD
MT. GOWER
AIRPORT

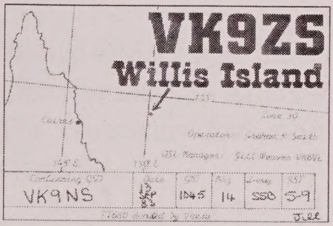
LORD HOWE
ISLAND

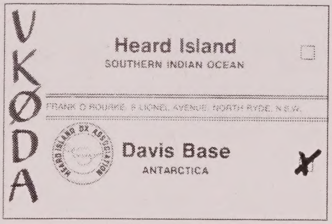

VK 9 NL
NORFOLK ISLAND

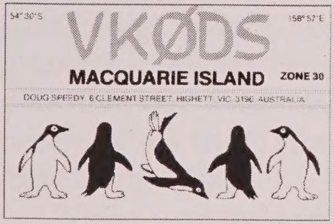

VK9XI
CHRISTMAS ISLAND

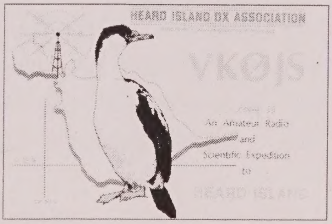

VK9YB
Cocos Keeling Islands
Paul Roehrs
31 Natalie Avenue,
Salisbury,
South Australia. 5108
Australia
Ex VK5CGR, VK9CGR Portable VK9Y. Current Calls VK5CGR, VK9YB


VK9ZR


VK9ZS
Willis Island
VK9NS
1045
14
SSB
5-9


VK0DA
Heard Island
SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN
FRANK O'ROURKE, 8 LIONEL AVENUE, NORTH RYDE, N.S.W.
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION
Davis Base
ANTARCTICA


54° 30'S
VK0DS
158° 57'E
MACQUARIE ISLAND
ZONE 30
DOUG SPEEDY 6 CLEMENT STREET HIGHETT VIC 3190 AUSTRALIA


HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION
VK0JS
An Amateur Radio
and
Scientific Expedition
to
HEARD ISLAND

Chapter 13

TO HEARD ISLAND AND RETURN

An Amateur Radio and Scientific Expedition to Heard Island.

5 - 16 February 1983.

Heard Island was high on the 'Wanted List' of most DXers and the lack of Amateur Radio activity in any of the rarer DX countries for more than a few years increased the demand.

Looking at a map of the southern Indian Ocean, one can easily see that Heard Island is isolated. Dominated by a 3,000m high volcano peak, Big Ben, it is indeed remote and a long sea voyage from Australia. A ship would have to pass through what many regard as the stormiest of the oceans of the world; the aptly named 'Roaring Forties' and 'Screaming Fifties'.

Whilst working in Papua New Guinea in the late 70's I became interested in Heard Island in Amateur Radio terms. In 1980, whilst I was still in Papua New Guinea as P29JS, I was hopeful of being able to join the Australian National Mapping Expedition to Heard Island. This Expedition was going to carry out a new survey of the island and surrounding area to update Australian records. In addition, since Heard Island was now unoccupied, it was necessary to 'Show the Flag' to confirm Australia's claim to this area.

I was, however, unsuccessful in obtaining a berth on the *Cape Pilar* on its journey to Heard Island. As a result, my thoughts now turned to the question of what was required to arrange independent means of travelling to Heard and back. This could not be a one-man expedition; it would take a group of 5 or 6 good operators and a 10-12 day period of operating to clear the demand for this rare DXCC country. It was on this premise that the Heard Island DX Association (HIDXA) was formed. It had a narrow focus, with Amateur Radio activity on Heard Island its only goal. Initially we focused only on the logistics of this long and difficult journey there and back.

That was the beginning. Several letters and telephone calls later, I made a visit to Canberra in relation to the island. At that time, only personnel of the Australian Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) were allowed to visit and stay on Heard Island. In addition, ANARE covered all other Australian Antarctic bases. There was no legislation in place to allow any extended stay for visitors, although there was an international convention in place that a vessel in difficulties could land a party for a stay of up to 48 hours.

As a result of my approach to the relevant authorities, some months later the applicable legislation was changed to permit visits to Heard Island under special conditions. This meant that any well-meaning and well-founded activity on Heard Island could now be authorised by issue of a permit. On reflection, the Australian authorities concerned were kind and helpful, and HIDXA received considerable assistance from the various departments concerned.

In due course, HIDXA received the agreement of 'permission in principle' to carry out an Amateur Radio DXpedition to remote Heard Island. In addition, the Department of Communications issued an Amateur Radio license in my name, with the callsign VK0JS to be used on the island. Later down the track another license, VK0NL, was issued to Kirsti. The suffix NL had been used by Nils Lied who as VK0NL had operated in the past (during his attachment with ANARE) from Heard Island. He graciously allowed his suffix to be re-issued to Kirsti.

Initially we thought that finances would not be too much of a problem. Many radio amateurs, on an international basis, needed Heard Island and we felt that financial help would be given if we asked. We duly informed all the main Amateur Radio outlets and even the then USSR amateurs became aware of our intentions.

In the coming weeks, financial considerations were to become more of a reality and it was to take three attempts to try and organise a charter vessel to get to Heard Island. The two previous attempts were in relation to a charter starting at Freemantle, Western Australia. However, in both cases there were difficulties with how the charter owner wished to utilise the vessel whilst we were on Heard Island. He wanted to use of the vessel to fish in the waters around the island; this was deemed unacceptable to the relevant authorities.

'Third time lucky' is a common saying world wide. 'Third time lucky' also has some *unlucky* implications as you will know. The famous lighting of a cigarette routine, under dark battlefield conditions, for example.

On September 4th 1982, HIDXA was finally able to enter into a contract agreement with the Thorbryn Towing and Salvage Co., the owners of the *Cheynes II*. Thus the vessel was secured for the HIDXA expedition to and from Heard Island.

Departure date was set at the first few days of January 1983, and we were confident that our group of expeditioners would be on Heard around the 17/18th January. We planned to leave Heard Island around the end of January, and for the group to be back home mid-February; the total round trip would take some 6 weeks.

As far as was possible, everything was done to see that all was in order. The contract cost HIDXA over A$1000 in solicitor's fees. In addition, HIDXA financed an independent survey on the vessel and its capabilities.

In chartering the *Cheynes II,* HIDXA had considerably widened its base, since the vessel had berths for 18 Expeditioners in addition to the crew. The range of interests grew and became larger than the original initial Amateur Radio focus. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the overall expedition organisation and planning were all controlled by the Amateur Radio group.

We had prepared a multi-page proposal covering our intentions during our proposed stay on Heard which we duly submitted to the Australian Authorities. HIDXA received an almost immediate reply with 'permission in principle' for the Amateur Radio part of the expedition, and their promise that the matters in the scientific area would be dealt with.

The authorities were concerned that no damage be done to the environment of Heard Island with its almost pristine state and its remote position. As a result, there are no introduced species, it is visited rarely, and only by ANARE personnel. The wild life population of the island had been slowly recovering from the ravages of those earlier sealing days.

Time was not on the side of HIDXA since all matters relating to the *Cheynes II* were not settled until September, 1982. This allowed a bare four months to get everything in order.

There followed weeks of continual telephone calls and letters and, by mid November, almost every matter had been dealt with. Applications from people to join the expedition had been processed and the make-up of expedition team had now been finalised.

Finally, things began to take shape, and the list of expeditioners was now complete. We then received permission from Canberra for the scientific part of the expedition to go ahead. It should also be mentioned that the Antarctic Division, Hobart, were most helpful and loaned us tents and many items of equipment for possible use on Heard Island. HIDXA also reached an agreement to carry a large stock of emergency rations to be left on the island for future use. Also, by arrangement, the local and well known Butane Gas Company supplied our gas needs, and we carried cylinders of this to Heard for cooking and heating. In Hobart, it was possible to get almost everything required. HIDXA provided everything except personal gear, sleeping bags and suitable cold weather clothing for all expeditioners. This area was the responsibility of the individual expeditioners.

The planning for our expedition to one of the most remote islands of the world was now falling into place. By this time, the group consisted of radio amateurs, scientists, mountaineers (who planned to climb Big Ben) and a film crew to record our efforts.

In November 1982 I left Norfolk Island to be in Hobart to get everything organised before our departure. Soon I was losing all track of time, as one thing after another required attention - the task of handling the logistics became formidable. HIDXA planned to put 17 expeditioners on this remote sub Antarctic island and deal with all areas of food, power, shelter, first aid and of course Amateur Radio. Each of the expeditioners paid A$3,000 as his or her share in charter costs, but not towards the cost of the fuel. As a result of this policy, we had a self motivated group. One has to be confident to pay that amount of money for a difficult and arduous expedition such as ours. This stood us in good stead later, as we were all able to function together as a team, despite hardship and a real element of danger.

Kirsti and I prepared menus covering all meals and estimated quantity requirements for all main items of food, with a built-in margin in case of problems requiring a longer stay. Now in Hobart, these requirements were being organised in real terms of tins, jars, packets of food and fresh food. Many business people in Hobart assisted with food and other donations. As an example, our target was food for 24 people (with that extra margin) for 8 weeks and, as events were to show, the expedition needed every crumb. By the way, the 24 included the crew of the *Cheynes II*.

It was fortunate that the *Cheynes II* had a huge hold area with no restrictions as to size and weight of material. As the days passed, the many items required were being collected gradually for loading on the vessel. Unfortunately, we did not realise the implications of the annual Sydney-Hobart Yacht Race. To make ready for the incoming yachts, the *Cheynes II* had to be moved from its convenient wharf area to a more remote one. It became harder and harder to get material to the boat. Many heavy items had to be man-handled quite a distance, as more areas of the dock were taken over ready for the final days of the race.

On picking up the Austrian mountaineering group at the airport, Hobart, I found it hard to believe my eyes. The sheer volume of equipment was staggering. In fact, they came as a complete and self-contained group. They, too, had worked hard on their logistic requirements.

The Amateur Radio part had been easier; this is the 'bread and butter' of the DXpeditioner. I found it easy to think through what was required, and slowly but surely the Amateur Radio package went together. I am indebted to several members of the Wireless Institute of Australia (WIA), Tasmania, for their help and support in Hobart.

Walt Marshall, W7SE, on vacation from his work in Saudi Arabia, helped me to check all the radio equipment. He arrived in Hobart several days prior to our scheduled departure, and we spent the time going over everything which had been collected, brought from Norfolk Island and obtained from local sources.

All rigs were checked, and leads and connectors wrapped up for each rig, thus as far as possible making each rig package complete. This was to ensure that all main items were together in the same place at the right time. Many amateurs loaned equipment, antennas, a linear amplifier, cables, and other items. In due course, they were recognised for their contribution to the expedition.

All antennas were pre-assembled to the maximum length possible to minimise effort on Heard Island. All had coaxial cable available, and all verticals had pre-cut radials to avoid doing this work on Heard. This attention to detail resulted in few problems once we were ashore. For beam support we used 2 inch scaffold aluminium poles; this thick walled tubing is rigid.

Finding suitable generators became a major problem. The aim was to put a minimum of two rigs on the air, and as we did not want to lose both stations if a generator failed, I had opted for individual generators, making each station independent of the other. This arrangement worked out well, and four petrol 2.0 kva generators (kindly donated on a loan basis) were put ashore on Heard Island. Bob Walsh, WA8MOA, and his untiring efforts with the generators kept us going, despite problems. In addition, we had battery back-up power, which allowed us to keep operating during refuelling.

We left Hobart on schedule with a 15 or 16 day sea voyage ahead of us. The voyage down the Derwent River was uneventful. As we cleared the Southern Tasman coast we hit gale force conditions. Force 8-9 winds had the *Cheynes II* in rough seas with 6-7 metre waves. The skipper/owner, Bob Barnett, decided to turn back for safe anchorage, but we ended up travelling back to Hobart itself. A few days later, we were on our way again with a new captain, Laurie Mac Ewan, normally based in Perth, WA. He decided to steam the westerly route for a few days to get acquainted with the *Cheynes II*. After three days, he abandoned the charter, saying that the vessel was using fuel at an alarming rate, and did not have the range to get to Heard Island and return.

After a telephone discussion with the owner, it was agreed that the *Cheynes II* would go to Albany in Western Australia and recommence the charter from there. After a delay of 2 days required checking the quality of the 'old' fuel stock, the vessel was refuelled at Albany. It was a great pity that Walt had to leave us at Albany due to work-related factors. Eventually the expedition was on its way, another couple of days behind schedule. Now the distance to Heard and return had been reduced, and the rest should have been 'plain steaming'!

As the *Cheynes II* made her way southwest, the weather got colder and the seas rougher; the 'roaring forties' were living up to their reputation. The vessel was a good sea boat however, and by this time we were all hardy seamen anyway. The possible exception was Bob Walsh, who was determined to be sea sick all the way to Heard Island and back. He had a terrible time, as sea sickness is an unhappy situation. The *Cheynes II* was built for these sorts of seas, and, with just the right length, the bows never went under and the propeller never came out of the water!

Three days out from the French possession of Kerguelen Island, the skipper informed me that the vessel was short of water; in fact, water for only four more days steaming were left in the ship and a detour would have to be made to Kerguelen to take on more. We would use valuable fuel to make this slight detour for the water the ship required, but there was, no option, so we set our course for Kerguelen Island. The stay on Kerguelen was pleasant and it was nice to get on dry land and walk around again. The French made us all welcome, and we had a pleasant meal and a great time. Kerguelen Island treated us to another episode, as the *Cheynes II* dragged anchor and ran aground. Fortunately, it was a temporary set back, and with fresh water aboard, the *Cheynes II* was on her way once again. Heard Island lay just a short day and half steaming away.

The outline of Heard Island was on the ships radar for hours, until we were standing off the Island, waiting for dawn and our landing in the Atlas Cove area. Several meetings and discussions had been held about this moment. All had been well briefed in what each of us had to do. First priority would be to get all equipment ashore and get ourselves secure for the night and, if at all possible, get one Amateur Radio station on the air.

Dawn broke and we made our way into Atlas Cove and dropped anchor. After completing our 4 am breakfast, a start was made to getting ashore. The weather was misty, but the sea calm. We knew that the maxi-yacht *Anaconda* of the Heard Island Expedition (HIE) was in the area. The HIE expeditioners would attempt to climb Big Ben from another starting point. They had also carried two radio amateurs, now based in Atlas Cove, operating with the callsign VK0HI.

A great deal of time was spent in unwrapping of dinghies (stored on the open deck) and opening of the hold, and this kept us all busy. By 7am our first dinghy was in the water, and the other followed soon after. The first dinghy was in trouble; the outboard engine would not start! To avoid wasting time, it was towed behind the second dinghy and a fair amount of gear was transferred to shore in this manner. Heard Island looked bleak, felt cold and damp, and, in general, lived up to its reputation. The organisation and the planning paid off however, and by noon we were all ashore with most of the equipment. There were no other problems. The weather remained calm and the sea in a moderate condition.

The mountaineers were helpful, and, with their muscle and stamina they contributed a great deal to getting all those heavy items up from the hold. Shortly afterwards, the mountaineers returned to the *Cheynes II* to collect all their own gear, and the crew made a decision to drop them off at Mechanics Bay. This was an area up the coast. Starting from there they would knock two days off their route to the top of Big Ben compared with starting from the Atlas cove area. This decision was meant to be helpful, and was taken by the skipper; but it went against my basic principle of all being in the relative safety of the Atlas Cove area. We were to pay later for this perceived error of judgment on departure from Heard Island under severe weather conditions.

The rest of the afternoon was spent lugging everything from the beach up to the various locations. Luckily, we had permission to use three metal buildings (Arbec Huts) on Heard. They had been built during a joint expedition in 1970. (We carried tents just in case they were unusable).

Two were shared by the scientists and film crew, the other, some 400 metres away, was used by the Amateur Radio group. These buildings were bleak and, in reality, only metal shells. They did, however, afford considerable shelter from the biting wind and the cold, drizzly rain. Our building had no door, since the hinges had long ago rusted through. The 1,200 litres of fuel came in 200-litre drums. These were dispatched for the shore from the *Cheynes II* and then towed by the aluminium dinghy. It was a long and hard struggle to get the six drums in position close to our generators.

It was in these miserable conditions that we had to get organised and try to get ourselves as comfortable as possible. All our efforts were concentrated on getting that first station on the air. In the process we lost our 'Minooka Special' antenna which collapsed in wet and windy conditions. It was an unlucky glitch. The 18AVQ vertical antenna was erected very easily. We were, in fact, successful in getting on the air that first night and VK0JS was up and running.

A hundred and one things were needed to keep the stations working and on the air. Holding up the antennas was a problem, as the topsoil was not at all what we thought it would be. In fact, we found about an inch of top black volcanic sand with hard rock underneath. Therefore we used large areas of Azorella clumps, and, by double-staking or even triple-staking into individual clumps, we made suitable anchorage points. All antennas remained in position, despite the stormy conditions which we experienced.

Band conditions were terrible, and it was with great effort that the total of radio QSOs gradually crept upwards. Any band which was 'open' was always used, but it was not often that we managed to get two or more stations on the air at once. It was frustrating.

A total of 150 contacts on 10m is an example of the conditions of propagation during the VK0JS operation from the island. Our final total was some 14,000 QSOs with 138 different countries, much lower than had been expected, but there was nothing that could be done.

In spite of the lower than had been expected QSO count, we had several notable firsts in terms of Amateur Radio: first YL operation (Kirsti VK0NL); first RTTY; first Slow Scan Television; first satellite QSOs (by SoJo). We were also available on 6m, but without success; nothing at all was heard on this band.

Daily skeds with the mountaineers kept us informed of their progress up Big Ben, and the scientists were able to get through their extensive work programme. The weather remained relatively warm at 3-4C and reasonably pleasant. We were all able to get outside, move around the base area and go down to the other huts to say hello.

The actual operating conditions were not the easiest. It seemed impossible to keep warm and the nights were long and cold. A real challenge to us all, to be sure. The generators required attention every few hours but it was felt it was better to stop and check every now and again, rather than to run them into the ground. We were dependent on those four generators from an Amateur Radio point of view.

I think it is fair to say that we were easy to 'work' or, maybe more correctly, we were always there for the multitude to try. We used the same frequencies each time. Endless calling of CQ ensured that we opened the bands, and we did not leave them until they were closed. The pile-ups were large with plenty of QRM on our channel; the usual 'policemen' activity. What is your callsign? This behaviour is the norm these days, and a great pity, more so when the station is being operated under our severe working and living conditions.

Until the last couple of days, the weather had been very kind. Heard Island now decided to remind us all that its reputation was no idle threat. The barometer headed downwards and, soon after, Heard Island was hit by a major storm. The mountaineers were within 6 hours of reaching the summit of Big Ben. They then sat in soaking clothes and wet tents waiting for the cold freeze that would allow them to reach the top. The snow and ice were melting under their feet!

As we counted the days towards departure, it was always part of the agreement that, if required, a stay of a couple of more days (subject to paying of course) could be arranged. This possibility was to be beaten finally by this dramatic change to the weather, with no guarantee that it would improve. We could not risk being stranded on Heard Island. So, over the final couple of days, unwanted items were carried down to the beach and stockpiled for our departure time - anything to take some of the strain away from the loading of everything back on board the *Cheynes II*. The storm soon made it impossible to get back on board the vessel - in fact, she was also in some trouble, and got up steam to keep under way during the storm.

Stores had to be moved back from the water's edge, as the severe gale winds were driving the sea up the beach of Atlas Cove, way over the normal water line. Kirsti was blown off her feet, and I started to chase a bag of gear careering across the sand. The black volcanic sand was being driven everywhere; it was painful as it stung every exposed part of the body. Hours later, everything on the shore-line had been moved back and, as things happened, we had just one more night on the island. We were lucky, as this enforced stay might have been much longer.

Meanwhile, back in the shack, VK0JS was on the air for a few more hours. The change in the weather had been sudden and violent. As we investigated our position, we had time to reflect on the last few days and just how fortunate we had been.

Atlas Cove and the old buildings of the ANARE site looked bleak and forlorn. We wondered how the old expeditioners of 1947, 48 and 50 had fared in these same buildings. Much of the old ANARE site of the late 40's was in ruins, as time and storm damage had done their work. It is easy to visualise just what a 6 ton elephant seal might do to a building, as it seeks some shelter from howling winds.

We had gone on little field trips ourselves when the bands were quiet. We had looked over the old sealing areas used before the days of ANARE and realised that their days must have been very harsh. Heard Island is unique, and Big Ben dominates Atlas Cove like Mount Fuji. When the cloud cover lifts, it allows a glimpse of its majesty, always presenting a different face. Those early morning sights of the mountain, enormous and beautiful Big Ben, are unforgettable.

Next morning, with the storm abating, we made a hurried start to getting back onboard the *Cheynes II*. The morning was spent dismantling antennas, packing rigs and preparing to get our equipment back on board. The entire group helped to carry our gear down to the beach. Then, another couple of expeditioners would be safely aboard, and, finally, Kirsti and I. This journey back to the ship in the small dinghy was one of the scariest times. The swell was enormous and with our backs to the *Cheynes II* the trip seemed endless. Since the *Cheynes II* had been moving around keeping out of trouble, we had no real idea of how far we had to go.

All of us from Atlas Cove were now aboard and relieved. Our dinghy continued its journeys back and forward, this time helping Al Fisher and Dave Shaw, the Amateur Radio operators of VK0HI (Heard Island Expedition) back to the *Anaconda II*. Finally we were now clear of the Atlas Cove area.

The reader may remember that our mountaineers had failed to reach the top, and had slowly made their way back down the mountain to their base in the Mechanics Bay area. They now had to be picked up and brought aboard the *Cheynes II*. As we rounded the point with our dinghy in tow, the tow line broke. The boat was swamped and quickly headed for the bottom of the ocean. All attempts to retrieve it failed. The *Anaconda II* then came to our assistance and, in return for our efforts on their behalf, used their Zodiacs to uplift our mountaineers in stormy weather. Then it was all over; with quick thanks and cheerio we were on our way home.

The *Cheynes II* was short of fuel and water. Arrangements had been made with the owner to rendezvous, bringing fuel and water for the vessel, about 600 miles south of Albany. After about two days of steaming, the skipper shut down the engine and we started to 'sail'. I use the word lightly, but that is exactly how we travelled 855 nautical miles in 368 hours at an average speed of about 2.32 knots with old tarpaulins rigged as makeshift sails. It was to be frustration at its worst; it was often impossible to tell whether we were moving or had come to a stop. One had to wait for a few hours and then check the position with the Satellite Navigator; we could tell if we had moved at all, and in which direction.

We had little or no wake from the vessel and even the Albatrosses had given up trying to fly alongside. They waited in the water until we drifted past, taking off again to land ahead of us, to repeat it all again. At one point we were going slowly enough for a penguin to walk aboard! Our penguin experts did some studies, weighed it, identified it, ringed it and then put it back into the sea to be on its way.

There was one frightening experience, at least for me, and this was to be woken at about 3am with the *Cheynes II*, 'gibing'. That is to say, since the vessel was fixed rigged, a sudden change in the wind direction meant that the vessel had to follow (a yacht gets round this problem by swinging the boom). So the boat became its own boom and turned on its own length at an alarming angle. I was convinced this was 'it' and that we were heading for the bottom of the sea. This early morning wake-up remains vivid in my mind, and I would not wish the moment to be repeated.

We got up steam again (using our remaining fuel) to meet our projected rendezvous and it felt good to be moving. The Southern Ocean is not the place to be hanging around on a dead ship, and I suppose we were lucky that we did not have a major storm. The *Cheynes II* was a terrific sea boat, lay low in the water, and, as I have said, it always felt safe. It had been built in 1947 for a Norwegian Whaling Company and named *Thorbryn* as part of its whale-chasing fleet. Sometimes it was easy to think that we were on a surfaced submarine.

The rendezvous was a tremendous moment, but let down with the owner coming with a tow line instead of fuel and water. Once again it was back to slow plodding hours as we made our way towards Albany. This time we were certainly moving. The weather got warmer and spirits began to soar with everyone looking forward to getting home. The journey back from Heard Island had taken 27 days and was a real marathon.

On arrival at Albany we all had much to do. In the case of HIDXA, all gear and belongings had now to be unloaded and arrangements made for all those borrowed items to be returned. Since we had started at Hobart, it meant a lot of extra expense to get items shipped across Australia to their final destination.

Once again, the mountaineers came to our rescue, and I am grateful to Bruno, Leopold, Walter and Werner for their assistance to clear the *Cheynes II*. It was a gruelling couple of days, and Kirsti and I then split resources. She returned to Hobart to tidy up there before returning home. Meanwhile as soon as I was finished in Albany, I travelled home to Norfolk Island to face the mountain of mail and several problems and headaches, after having been away for almost four months.

For myself, I must thank all those who believed, helped and waited. It was a long wait in many ways, but Heard Island is not the easiest of places to get to. Financial considerations had always been the problem, and it was not until we secured the means of transport that it was felt that, finally, we were on our way.

HIDXA put the following people on Heard Island.

Amateur Radio and Organisation

James B. Smith	Leader and Organiser	VK9NS
Kirsti Jenkins-Smith	Co-Organiser	VK9NL
Sjoerd Jongens	Co-Organiser	VK7ZSJ
Robert P. Walsh	Operator	WA8MOA
Walter Flor	Operator	OE1LO

(Walter Marshall, W7SE withdrew at Albany with a time related problem related to his work in Saudi Arabia.)

Scientists

Prof H. Heatwole	Zoologist
Dr. Robert T. Jones	Veterinary Surgeon
Dr. Jeremy M.B. Smith	Botanist
Dominique Ward	Zoologist
Claire Speedie	Ornithologist
Alison Greene	Geologist

NB. Alison, a Canadian (vacationing in the area), joined us in Albany with three hours notice.

Tom, VK6MK (now a SK) in Perth, housed her monster motor bike in his garage. She was holidaying in Albany at the time she decided to join our group!

HIDXA

a) Replaced the Automatic Weather Station for the Antarctic Division and returned the old unit for inspection and evaluation.
b) The Automatic Weather Station used by the Glaciology Section, Antarctic Division was recovered and returned to Australia.
c) Weather observations every four hours each day for the Department of Meteorology, Melbourne and transmitted these reports to the Australian mainland.
d) Took bird sightings each hour of daylight and logged types and numbers.
e) Air samples were taken, on a regular basis, for CSIRO Canberra.

The Heard Island DX Association, Inc. a registered non-profit making body under Australian law.

The HIDXA Philatelic covers were carried to Heard Island, and later became available from HIDXA, Norfolk Island. Funds from the sales were used to help defray the fuel costs, which were considerable.

A documentary film 'The Ship That Shouldn't Have' was shown on Australian TV.

For those interested, the following pieces of equipment were put on Heard Island:

4 ICOM 701 (with battery back-up, complete with microphone, Morse key and required leads.
1 ICOM 720 for Satellite work, Communications, Slow Scan and RTTY.
1 ICOM 740 complete with built in keyer and external power supply.
1 KENWOOD TS 830 complete with remote VFO, power supply and all leads.
1 YAESU FT 901ZM complete with mike and leads.
1 TH3MKIII with rotator and indicator.
2 TH3jr complete with coaxial cable.
1 3el 10 m beam.
1 3el 15 m Beam.
3 18AVQ multiband Verticals complete with radial systems.
Pre-cut Dipole antennas for the various bands. Back-up wire and connectors, coaxial cables, and a multitude of bits and pieces.
4 Petrol engine generators.
VHF and 6 m equipment.
Hand-held units for local communication with field workers, and mountaineers.

After those long weeks away from Norfolk Island, Kirsti and I were both back home. It had all been a marathon DXpedition of heroic proportions, and countless matters were awaiting our attention. In the weeks and months that followed, life settled down to a more normal style. That same year, I attended both the Visalia and Dayton HamVention in the USA. The main programme at each of the venues was the HIDXA DXpedition to Heard Island.

There was a price to pay for it all, of course, with expenses to be recovered. I was now considering a return to Civil Aviation Agency (if they would have me back) in Papua New Guinea. However, that is another story!

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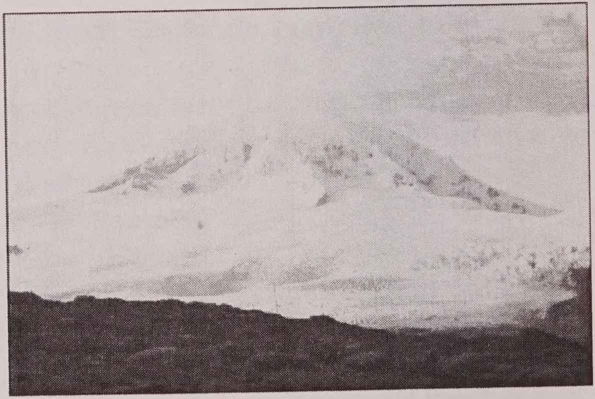
AUSTRALIA
TASMANIAN
DIVISION

Group photo just before departure.

Cheynes II en route for Heard Island early 1983.



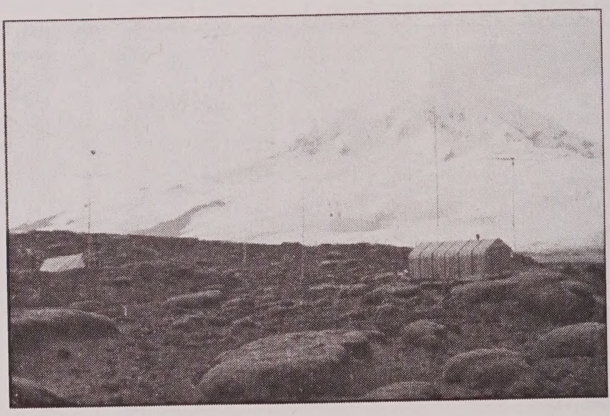
Big Ben, 3000m, Heard Island 1983.

Atlas Cove, Heard Island the old ANARE jetty.

Old 1947 ANARE base buildings in 1983.

VK0JS/NL shack, living quarters, Heard Island 1983.

Arbec hut showing 3el tri-band beam and HF6V.



VK0JS shack and antennas, Big Ben in background.

Cheynes II back in Albany after Heard Island.

Chapter 14

RETURN TO PAPAUA NEW GUINEA 1984/86

Once clear of Albany, Kirsti and I flew to Sydney where we parted company. Kirsti went to Hobart to collect our personal belongings which we had left there, while I headed for Norfolk Island.

The Heard Island expedition had caused us to be away from Norfolk for a long time. On our return, there was much to do starting with the loose ends after the expedition. The *Cheynes II* had arrived back in Albany, more than 2,000 miles (3218 kms) from Hobart, our intended destination on our return. Although we had tidied up some of the major issues in Albany such as returning the four loaned generators by road transport, many other items still needed to be returned. HIDXA had received a great deal of assistance from many sources, by way of loaned equipment.

There were also the ongoing problems with the *Cheynes II*, the charter costs (already paid) and the expensive tow back to the mainland. It was my view, after being given a substantial bill (relating to a towing charge) by the owner of the vessel that HIDXA owed him nothing. The contracted charter costs had been paid promptly and I felt that the capability of the vessel had been misrepresented by the owner. I telephoned the HIDXA solicitor in Hobart and we agreed that if the owner of the vessel continued with his threat to sue, we would start a counter suit. For example, we had not been advised of the modifications to the fuel or water tanks or that the vessel did not have the range capability of getting to Heard Island and back. He thought it likely that we would win any legal action but he pointed out that legal fees would be considerable.

I had spent a great deal of time in Hobart, becoming part of the preparations of the vessel for the long journey to and from Heard Island. The capabilities and range of the vessel range had been determined by independent survey by a reputable person. It never occurred to me to check the fuel tank dimensions, other than to at least notice the four fuel tanks of equal size. The problem of the erratic fuel use was not solved until our diversion to Albany. There, an ex *Cheynes II* crew member came aboard. He explained that after its acquisition by the Cheynes Beach Whaling Company the vessel had undergone several major modifications. The two inner tanks had been made smaller to allow room for the installation of ASDIC (Anti-Submarine detection investigation committee) equipment. The forward water tanks had also been removed to make way for the crew's quarters.

Back then the Cheynes II had been based in Albany and had had an altogether different life: go out in the morning after a search by spotter plane had located the pod, kill the whales, and in the late afternoon tow them back to base for processing.

On my return to Norfolk Island, I found many problems awaiting attention. Those bills, along with their numerous reminders had gone unanswered. There was the general state of the house which had been neglected for many weeks. There was one issue which sticks in my mind, namely American Express! Endless reminders had been sent about my unpaid balance, and there were even a couple of telegrams. Of course I understood their situation; they had gone through their automatic process with a customer not paying the money due. What I was *not* prepared for was that when I contacted them directly by phone, it was like talking to a brick wall!! I had already paid the amount due (not a large amount) and yet I was unable to get my card re-instated. The inflexible business mind-set was unmovable, and I had valued that card; it had helped many times on my travels. I had always paid the total due on receipt of their statement. I liked this arrangement as I don't like being in debt.

In business terms JB Smith (Electronic Services) was on shaky grounds. My customers had gone elsewhere when their VCR, or whatever else, had failed. It would have taken some time to regain my earning capabilities in this area and to re-establish my customer base.

In Amateur Radio terms, a huge backlog of mail (in the shape of QSL cards) waited in silent accusation. I regarded this as the easy part. I was well used to dealing with hundreds of envelopes with QSL card requests. It was easy in the sense that it only took time, patience and application; this area was the least of our problems.

Kirsti was back on the island and when we had a chance to sit down and look at the situation, we realised that the expedition had eaten up a great deal of our money. The simplest of arithmetical calculations showed that the remaining expenses were in our court. Our Solicitor had suggested that we put a clause in the HIDXA expeditioners' agreement on the subject of "if things went wrong, who will pay?" HIDXA had not taken him up on this suggestion. All those weeks later, in hindsight, I realised that he had been absolutely right. But each of us had suffered loss of salaries and wages, and I felt that this was enough. The expeditioners had all paid their (then) charter share in full and I didn't feel justified in asking them for more.

Whether right or wrong, I felt that the financial problems were my problem to solve. Since an expedition to Heard Island had been my idea, solving the current situation of balancing the books was my responsibility. Kirsti had already sacrificed a great deal to support to this dream of mine which I had when I came to live on Norfolk Island.

There seemed nothing I could do on the Island to make a major step towards the injection of money into our collective funds. I began to think of Civil Aviation Authority in Papua New Guinea as a solution. I had been told on my departure that if I ever wished to return to the Agency, then I should get in touch. So I started the enquiry process with the Agency with a view to securing an 18 month contract. It did not seem too long a period and it carried a major benefit; the payment of a lump sum at the end of the contract. One other advantage was on my side, I was known to the Agency, and I knew what was involved. It would be possible to arrive one day and start work the next; no wasted weeks of finding my way around.

In passing, I will mention that I attended two other interviews in addition to one for CAA. One which interested me was the possibility of a contract in Nauru, in those days awash with Phosphate money. This was a long term contract, and I did not want to be away from Norfolk longer than required. The contract was attractive, but in the end, the philosophy of 'better the devil you know' prevailed. I was soon heading for Port Moresby, via Brisbane, where I was met at the airport and taken to my accommodation near CAA in Konedobu.

I had a couple of days to settle in; the house allocated was roomy and close to work! The barking of the dogs, a part of P.N.G. night life, kept me awake for ages, but finally morning arrived. In the days to follow, I soon adjusted to the nightly row and slept soundly. I reported to the main office in the CAA, HQ building and was briefed on what my task would be. Many of the old faces were around and this was to be a huge advantage in helping me to settle in.

This time around I would not be at HQ but would be in charge of the CAA workshop complex, also in the immediate Konedobu area. I was able to walk to and from my office and house, which became handy on occasions. The next 18 months, in which I was to run the work-shop complex, proved to be a different area of work to that previously, but all tied to the needs of the Agency.

For example, I was involved in the preparation and wiring of new equipment racks for facilities at Port Moresby or outlying stations. In truth, I found that I had a huge advantage gained during those previous five years of work within the Agency. I had visited almost all of the outstations; therefore on arrival back in CAA I was able to 'hit the ground running' as they say. No settling in, no finding one's feet. Within a couple of weeks I felt settled and at ease.

In Amateur Radio terms I was still P29JS, and in this area I received a great welcome back from the P29 group. It had taken a few weeks to get back on the air but at least now I was able to be in touch with Kirsti on a regular basis. It was strange to think of Kirsti and her first use of her VK9NL call with P29JS in those years before Heard Island. This hobby was a great help to us both, as neither of us were happy about the separation.

As things settled down, Kirsti had made a start to the writing of her book "Heard Island Odyssey". As the book progressed, and I began to receive her first drafts, we did a lot of editing (on line!) during our skeds. Page 26, Para 3, change the typo xyz to zyx. Of course, in those days this was not 'on line' but via Amateur Radio. We did a great deal of editing in this way.

I also had another advantages, in that I had access to a couple of typists who did not mind taking work home. It was a way for them to earn a few extra dollars and they were excellent copy typists, fast and accurate. The "Heard Island Odyssey" manuscript was thus licked into shape, complete with carbon copies. A P.N.G. friend of mine was an artist in a publication firm. I approached him to ask if he would design a cover for Kirsti's book - on a professional, payment basis, of course. He came up with several ideas, and Kirsti adopted the one that she liked best.

I was able to do most of the work needed on the photographs to be used in the book. Port Moresby had an excellent film photographic processing company, and they did a wonderful job in preparing top quality black and white prints for use in the book. This expertise makes quite a difference to a print in its final form. These days we take this for granted with the use of well-known *Adobe Photo Shop* and other computer image processing programmes.

Everything for the book was in place and after shopping around, Kirsti chose a Hong Kong company to print her book. The company had an excellent reputation and was competitive in their pricing, which was important. She had written her book with a strong feeling that it had to be done. It had been an amazing adventure and a dangerous as things turned out, but all involved had stuck together. She felt that we had all achieved something quite remarkable. Of course, I believe that she also thought the book would sell easily, and help to refill the family coffers.

It is a fickle world in reality and our world of Amateur Radio is no different. It took many years for her excellent book to be sold out. It is a book I would have been unable to write, as, truth to tell, I was quite angry about a few issues. I would have become bogged down in a recrimination cycle. It was appalling what was done by some, in the name of Amateur Radio, to decry that epic journey to Heard Island and return.

Kirsti was able to come to P.N.G. a couple of times and that was a huge help to us both. On her first visit she was issued an Amateur Radio licence, P29KJ and she was quite active on the bands. It must be said that life in Port Moresby was restricted in many ways; it had a big law and order problem. Unlike most areas of the Pacific, it was considered unsafe to walk about in the town after dark. A shame, really, when one considers the 'night markets' of many cities in the area - a time of day when people are relaxing, buying an evening meal and food for the coming days.

Port Moresby had several hotels with excellent dining facilities, many restaurants and even one specialising in Japanese cuisine. It was a busy, bustling city tainted by the difficulties of lawlessness. As a result, the expatriate community fell back on the time-honoured pastime of visiting one's friends in their homes. In this way, pleasant evenings were spent in complete safety, but, with thoughts of the drive home, always avoiding this or that area.

The 14220 net was still running in those days and one evening when it had finished I received a telephone call. The person checked my name and asked me a couple of questions about where I worked and lived. He requested that I meet him and a colleague at the down town XYZ hotel. I was surprised to learn that they were both Federal policemen!!!

About an hour later Kirsti and I headed down to the lounge of the said hotel. After the usual introductions, the two policemen explained that they were interested in the activity of the 220 net; in particular - what was its purpose? After picking myself up off the floor, I was able to gasp – 'in what respect exactly?' I explained the basics of the Amateur Radio service, licensing, callsigns structures and band allocations. The 220 net was a daily gathering of international radio hams who could then contact each other on the net.

One of the officers went on to explain that the net had been monitored for some time. The authorities felt that the net might have been involved in drug trafficking (fame at last!), hence their visit. The explanation continued in that during the search of a yacht, a piece of paper had been found, in the radio room, with the words P29JS, 14220 net, daily 0500 UTC written on it. There were many scribbled references to the net in a note book. I was able to point out that the net was well known with literally 1000s of ears listening. I felt that it would be impossible to use it for clandestine purposes. Shortly after, the pleasant meeting was over and Kirsti and I headed downstairs to have dinner in the restaurant.

I mentioned earlier that I was within walking distance of my place of work, with a slightly longer walk the CAA HQ building. I had bought a small car, and my house, which was on the side of a hill, had a garage down at road level. The longish flight of concrete steps helped keep me and any visitors healthy. The car was parked in an enclosed wire mesh area holding three cars and my section gate was locked up at night. Konedobu was notorious for the theft of cars belonging to expatriates! As a result, we were all savvy in taking steps to keep the car safe, always locked up with no ignition key left in the ignition switch. If it had been practical to bolt our cars to the ground - we would have done it.

I came down one morning following the usual routine; I locked the house, locked the chain-link fence entrance to my house area and headed down to the car. Subconsciously I noted the car was still there, but when I went to unlock the gate of the garage I realised that it was already open. That was careless of me, I thought, lucky the car is still there! I got into the car and, as I was about to sit down I realised why the car was still in place; the steering wheel had gone!!! It was a shock; I was completely at a loss as to who on earth would pinch a steering wheel?

The answer was to come later. I reported the damaged car immediately and within ten minutes had the police at the garage area. After the usual questions, name, place of work, car details and so forth, we got around to pleasantries. My first question was, why take the steering wheel? I was enlightened by one experienced policeman. "Your make of car has a steering lock and is notorious for a weakness in design in this area, and this is why your car was targeted." He went on to explain what they do. The vehicle is opened, an easy door lock to force, and the front seat is pushed well back. (I had noticed that, in case you are wondering.) The thief sits well back in the seat and brings his feet up to the steering wheel. Judging things with care, (with years of practise) his feet are drawn back and, with a quick move the steering wheel is kicked hard with a twisting motion. This quickly sheers the steering lock, and the car is rolled back into the street for a quick get away.

In my case this novice had kicked too hard, sheered the whole steering shaft and so he had taken the steering wheel anyway - you never know when you might need one, I suppose! I never heard any more about the incident, and in due course I went on to replace the car with a different model. Not a bad story, really, but disconcerting, especially first thing in the morning,

Within CAA many things had changed. P.N.G. had moved forward to take over the running of its Civil Aviation, still dependent, here and there, on expatriate workers. In that way it was different to the days of my arrival a few months before their Independence Celebrations back in early 1975.

I had another reward for this enforced re-run of living in P.N.G. My new activity as P29JS enabled me to apply for DXCC Honor Roll. This had been impossible during those previous years as some 13 DXCC countries were not active. This was mainly due to 'no Amateur Radio activity' as a result of political restrictions. Countries such as the PR of China, Burma, and Mozambique spring to mind. These few years later it was easy to work most of these countries as they became available as a result of internal changes.

Now, after my eighteen month's stay, it was time to leave P.N.G. for what was to be the last time. I left with a feeling of sadness and happiness all mixed in an impossible emotional cocktail. P.N.G. had served me well and I had tried hard to do the same for my employers. 18 months of solid savings and that final bonus filled that financial gap created as a result of Heard Island.

Kirsti had arrived in November, spending the last few months in Port Moresby. My extended return to the folds of the CAA in Papua New Guinea had come to an end, and had now brought the Heard Island DXpedition to a close. Being in P.N.G. enabled me to make airline and other bookings at attractive prices. For example, I was able to book an Australian train journey which would take us to Perth, Alice Springs and back to Sydney.

Being in the world of airlines I was able to book a vacation travel package for Kirsti and me to travel to Europe via the USA. This trip would enable us both to meet each others families in the UK and Norway.

There had been a farewell get together for Kirsti and me with my CAA colleagues at Konedobu. We all said our goodbyes and our baggage had been collected from the house and taken to the airport. From there it would go by air freight to Norfolk Island. Next morning we were soon clear of the house, hand-over completed and the keys returned. We were driven to the air port ready for the Sydney plane.

The flight to Sydney, via Brisbane was uneventful and we booked into the airport hotel for a one night stop-over. After having breakfast next morning, we headed to the railway station and there we boarded the Indian Pacific train for the trip to Perth in Western Australia. This journey would take three days covering a distance of some 2,500 miles (4000 kms), quite a trip. We had a comfortable suite with facilities, and soon settled in, ready for departure. There was a nice dining room and also a large comfortable area with seating and tables. In this area we were able to order drinks and snacks.

Soon after, we were on our way and the train headed for a long climb over the Blue Mountains, down to Broken Hill and on to Port Pirie. The area is a very busy tourist destination with a huge National Park with plenty of accommodation and facilities available at the various attractions.

Broken Hill is world famous as a mining area with the largest known reserve of silver, zinc and lead in the world. The area was discovered (in mining terms) in 1883 by Charles Rasp. The area lies in the middle of a very arid desert region and for the 30,000 miners and families water is brought from the famous Murray Darling river basin. In itself the water pipe line is an engineering feat as before its time every drop of water had to be hauled long distances. This initially limited the development of the mine to its full potential.

For good measure, in the region there are endless smaller mines extracting a variety of the Opal which is much valued. The area is pock marked with hundreds of craters each surrounded by the sand dug from the mine it self. The miners stay cool by residing and working 'down under'.

The next stop was Port Pirie which lies at the start of the long train journey across the Nullabor plain, an amazing trip of over 2,000 miles (3218 kms). This railway has a section of line of some 298 miles (478 kms) long, the longest straight section of line in the world.

This journey across the Nullabor seemed at times to be an endless view of a stark, dry and featureless desert. There are some areas of scrub, but we saw almost no wildlife. For some reason I had expected to see kangaroos in their hundreds but we saw none at all. This was explained to me as being the result of the almost complete lack of water in the area. We saw just one emu during this whole journey. The desert does have a hypnotic effect. One can only imagine the hardships involved in the building of this remarkable piece of railway engineering.

The meals and service on the train were really good and the lounge area pleasant. There was also an electronic organ, and videos were played in the evenings. In here we also met the other passengers. Some were to travel only part of the way and others, like us, all the way to Perth.

The train had another feature in that at Port Pirie several long loaders, to carry vehicles, had been attached. The road across the Nullabor is a rough and dangerous place to be if one has a break down. There were three truck drivers on the train, and one explained that the cost of wear and tear together with cost of fuel made it more economic to carry their Lorries on the train. The railway had introduced these feature years ago, and carried trucks at quite a reasonable rate.

Later, after we had traversed the Nullabor we had a stop for a few hours at Calgoorly. The city is an old gold mining town of great historical interest. The amount of gold mined in this region is truly stupendous and there is a joke that the city will one day fall into a great hole in the ground. The main street would the first to go.

We joined a bus tour of the local area which was interesting, and it certainly helped to put the area in perspective. The driver was keen to drive us around one local area with endless pubs, strip joints complete with madams, et al. They say that more gold ended up in this area than was ever taken back home by the miners!

We arrived at Perth not long after our stop at Kalgoorlie and the amazing three day trip now over. We had quite literally travelled from the east coast to the west coast of Australia - from Sydney on the Pacific East coast to Perth on the Indian Ocean West coast of Australia; a trip of some

2,500 miles (4,000 kms).

From Perth we caught a coach for the trip to our old stomping ground of Albany! Tom, VK6MK, met the bus and drove us into town where we booked into a hotel.

Shortly after, Tom drove us to the pier area where the *Cheynes II* still lay after its marathon battle with Heard Island. The vessel had been sold to a local business man. His idea was to create a floating restaurant, and when we met, we were shown over the boat. Alterations had already commenced with mess rooms and galley areas gutted for future modernisation. It was a strange feeling being back on board – the ship had certainly left its indelible mark on us both. The owner had also done a great deal of work in the preparation of a dining area, and the vessel had been treated to a new coat of paint. Even as I write this, the *Cheynes II* remains stuck in Albany, quietly floating in silence. The restaurant project never materialised due to several factors such as industrial disputes. She was not in the mood to be used in this fashion and still very sulky and fickle.

Whilst in the area, we visited the Cheynes Beach Whaling Company station and this was interesting. It had been turned, in part, into a museum, and the history of whaling in the area was documented in various ways

There is sadness in this story, with the almost complete destruction of the whale for profit. The difference in outlook today, in Australia, over whaling issues is remarkable. There are strong vocal and written outbursts against any idea of the resumption of whaling – Australia certainly has its share of the reality of this wonderful creature. The humpback whale travels annually, with or without its young, down the east coast of the continent en-route for its feeding grounds. Its goal is to reach the rich feeding areas of the Southern Ocean before returning and repeating the whole cycle. Whale watching has become a tourist gold mine in Albany and the east coast of Australia which is much more profitable than killing the animal.

It was now time to get a move on. We said our goodbyes to Tom, VK6MK and, after a repeat coach trip, we were soon back in Perth. Next day we caught a plane to Alice Springs, the heartland of the Australian continent. Here we became tourists and joined an over night trip to Uluru - that gigantic chunk of rock rising from the ground in wonderful splendour. On the way we stopped at Mount Olga, colloquially the Olga's (the Devil's Marbles). The area is located in the Uluru-Kata Tjuti National Park and the some 30-40 huge red stones are an amazing sight. There is a strong impression of them being round from a distance but maybe the Aborigine idea of them being many heads is better. Mount Olga itself is actually higher than Uluru (Ayers Rock) lying 30 miles (50kms) to the North West. We made a long dehydrating walk in the area before continuing to the Sheraton Hotel, where we were finally able to clean up, eat and relax.

Next morning we went to Uluru by coach. It is an amazing experience to walk around the rock base, with its endless entrances to deep gulleys and caves. I climbed this huge rock and it required considerable energy to do so, despite the hand rope guide. They say that Uluru never presents the same face, but rather a constantly changing one of beauty and sheer size. I can understand why the native Aborigine regards it with such awe and believes that it is something born in their distant past history. It seems to have been there for ever.

Back in Alice Springs we toured the town area. The Alice is an amazing place, totally geared up for the tourist traffic. It has a great shopping centre with numerous shops and attractions. There are shops selling the wonderful art of the Aborigine and these days their art is protected by a copyright arrangement. They get a return on everything sold. Their 'Dot' painting style is amazing to see; who would think that those series of multicoloured dots would be so dramatic in visual effect? Numerous shops sold the results of opal mining taking place in the area. The opal in this area is different to those found in the Kalgoorlie region as they are multi coloured. Other shops sold other wooden Aborigine artefacts – the Didgeridoo and the Boomerang being a couple examples of their work.

Kirsti and I also caught up with the local VK8 amateurs, and were made welcome. In Amateur Radio terms I had always thought of Alice Springs as being remote. I have to be honest and say that I never ever thought that one day I would actually be THERE.

We also visited a couple of other tourist 'must see' locations. Alice Springs has one of the oldest Telegraph stations, from the early days of communications in this vast continent. It was interesting and everything well presented. In addition we visited the famous Flying Doctor Service station and learned of its work in dealing with patients in the outback areas.

It was in Alice Springs that we saw the Aborigine people of Australia in relatively large numbers. They have a hard life and there are great difficulties in the integration of these proud and hard-pressed people.

It was soon time to leave Alice Springs and once again board a train, this time the famous Ghan railway linking the 'Alice' with Adelaide far to the south. Unfortunately this leg of our journey was an overnight and there was little to see during this trip of some 930 miles (500 kms).

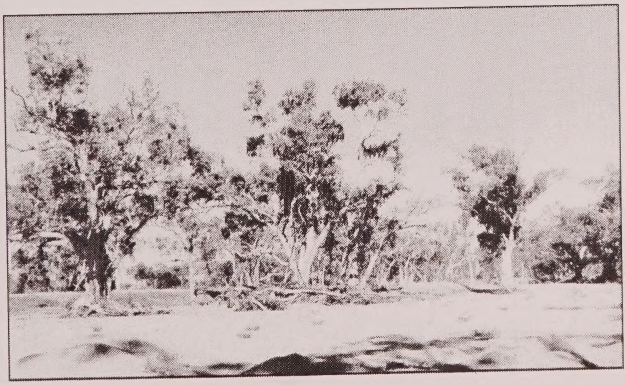
In Adelaide we met with some old P.N.G. friends of mine from my earlier days in P.N.G. We also met one of our founding HIDXA members Ken Stevens, VK5QW, who turned out to be quite a character. He was a 'bookie' by profession and told the story of his life when he was a teenager and worked in a circus arena. A general 'dogs body' until he developed his skill which was an unusual one – he was a motor bike rider on the so called Wall of Death! Sadly Ken is now a silent key. Ken was a stalwart supporter of HIDXA and its activities. He took us both and those Adelaide friends of mine out to dinner. We were treated like royalty, such was the hospitality shown to us in this wonderful restaurant chosen by Ken. Everyone seemed to know him and we had a wonderful evening. We were to keep in touch with Ken over many years, and I valued his no nonsense approach to this or that problem within Amateur Radio.

Now it was time for our vacationing to end and for us to head back to Norfolk Island and restart family living again. There was much to be done after such a long absence. The trip back via Sydney was uneventful, but by this time, nothing could faze us.

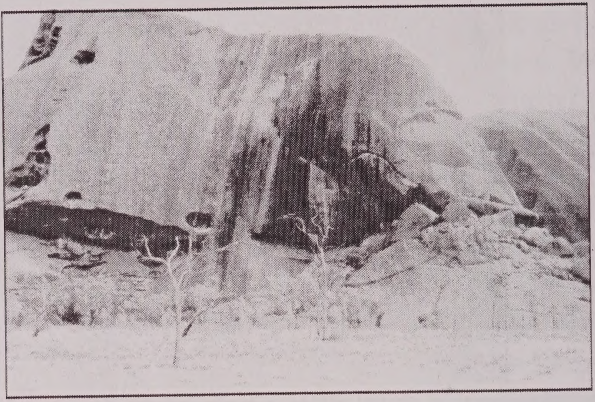
During this vacation trip, we had certainly 'been there and done that', with a vengeance.

Sydney railway station, departure point for our train.

Early morning in down-town Alice Springs.



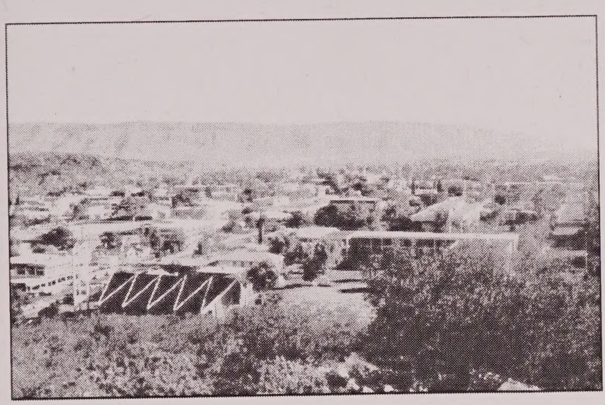
The bed of the famous 'Olga River', Alice Springs.



A part view of the colossus of Ayers Rock. Uluru.

Ayers Rock area, Uluru, Central Australia.

Old site of Flynn's Memorial using an Olga Stone.



Early morning view over Alice Springs (The Alice) .

ALICE SPRINGS

The Ghan almost ready to depart for Adelaide.

ALICE SPRINGS

Leaving Alice Springs for Adelaide, South Australia.

Chapter 15

AROUND THE WORLD IN 60 DAYS

On arrival back on Norfolk Island we were pleased to find that my ex-P.N.G. sea freight and our air freight had arrived safely. Everything had been brought up to our front 'yard' along with a Customs officer! In due course everything was cleared with no problems and the minimum of fuss.

It was still not the time to settle down as we had several commitments to meet. These were a wedding in Sydney (Kirsti's son Arne) followed by onward travel to the USA, and on to the UK and Norway. During the visit to England and Norway we would each become more acquainted with our new extended families.

We took advantage of an airline ticket bargain. This was the 'Round the World' ticket which was heaven sent for people like us, enabling us to kill a lot of commitments with one stone, or should that be with one air line ticket?

We made arrangements to leave Norfolk Island for Sydney. After a stop-over of a few days, we would travel to the USA, England, Norway, and Denmark and back to England. We would return to Sydney/Norfolk Island with a stop-over in New Delhi and Hong Kong. I feel exhausted just remembering it!

The wedding of Arne and Denise in Sydney went off very well; it enabled Kirsti to catch up with her family. We then headed for the USA and arrived in Los Angeles - anyone remember those painless arrivals at international airports, compared to the nightmares of today?

In Los Angeles, Ralph, W6SPQ, kindly put us up for a couple of days where we had a very pleasant stop-over. Ralph was a very interesting person and he had an amazing collection of vintage radios (see later chapter). We met several of the LA hams and did some sightseeing before heading for San Francisco.

The stop-over in SF was really pleasant. We stayed with Mary, KB6CLL, who had been such a staunch supporter of the 220 Net and HIDXA over many years. The group in SF had gone to a lot of trouble to arrange a get-together with a wonderful reception and meal. The days spent there passed quickly and we were also able to do some sight seeing. We were flown in a small plane and given a bird's eye view of the immediate SF areas, including lunch at Nut Tree Farm which had its own convenient airstrip.

Next we headed for Dayton, Ohio to attend the weekend HamVention, held annually. We both had commitments there to give DX orientated presentations to the DXers. In the meantime, we had received an invitation by the Kansas City DX Club to be their guests in Kansas. During this stop-over they would show us around Kansas City and, for good measure, we travelled with them to Dayton.

From SF it was first off to Kansas where we stayed as the guests of the KCDX group. We had a very pleasant stop-over with plenty of fun. We both remember the DX-orientated video tape presentation which had been made members of the Group – 'DXpeditioning Kansas Style'!! Among several other skits on the Club video tape, Kirsti recalls the one section about the top notch CW gun –

preparing to enter the CQWW CW contest. Several of the group had dressed up as cowboys – with low slung, fast on the draw Morse keys!

On the Friday we headed for Dayton where Kirsti and I had a courtesy weekend HamVention hotel booking (as we were both making presentations). Our room was comfortable and well-appointed. The evening was spent meeting with other DXers as guests of the KCDX group's hospitality suite. We later toured around several of the other hospitality suites hosted by other DX groups, for example we met Lloyd and Iris Colvin of YASME fame. By the time we were back in our room it had been a long day, and we would also have a busy time over the next couple of days.

The huge Hara arena hall area was filled with stalls and presentations given by the various manufacturers and distributors of Amateur Radio material including the latest all singing and dancing rigs, with their latest bells and whistles. For someone used to Norfolk Island and the difficulties of getting this or that part, it was all a gold mine of endless offers of plugs, sockets, cable, components, and so forth.

Outside the main building there was the famous 'flea market' which caught my attention. Many wonderful older rigs and pieces of equipment were there to be haggled over. In addition were thousands of radio valves (tubes) and the countless items that are special to our hobby.

Here, too, were the numerous vendors of the components and items mentioned previously. Renting the outside stall areas was a much cheaper option to that of the main hall. There were many bargains to be had and haggling was the name of the game to secure your much needed item.

We each also had our commitment to the DX Programme and, in due course, we made our presentations of our slides and accompanying 'spiel' - now there is an

Americanism for you!

It is a mere 20 years (as I write this) since Kirsti and I attended this Dayton HamVention. At Dayton I was in for 'one of those moments in time,' and each of us is sure to have at least one such memory!

My name and callsign were called and I suddenly became a member of a very unique group of radio amateurs. I had been elected to the CQ Hall of Fame Award.

The CQ Magazine Hall of Fame Award. (April 1986)

The following paragraphs were published in the April 1986 issue of CQ Magazine:

> Congratulations to Jim Smith, P29JS/VK9NS, on his election to the DX Hall of Fame. Jim is shown above operating his well equipped station on Papua New Guinea.
>
> (Thanks to Bob Winn, W5KNE, editor of QRZ DX, for the photo) P.O. Box 205, Winter Haven, FL 33882
>
> The CQ DX Awards Advisory Committee is pleased to announce the election of Mr. Jim Smith, P29JS/VK9NS, to the DX Hall of Fame.
>
> Election to the DX Hall of Fame is the ultimate Honor for a DXer, and is only conferred on amateurs whose contributions to DX have been 'above and beyond' the call of duty, made often at great personal sacrifice of time and resources with no thought of personal gain, and which have stood the test of time. Those elected to the Hall of Fame have included great DXpedition operators, leading QSL managers, DX writers and others who have given fully of themselves and of their time for DX.
>
> Jim Smith's nomination was from the category of great DXpedition operators. Since 1948, when he first operated on the 20m band as CAR from Car Nicobar Island, Jim has held 28 different callsigns. In recent years, many of his expeditions have been major events producing thousands of contacts from each location. Jim is a communications

technician by profession. He worked for the Civil Aviation Agency in Papua New Guinea and now has a small electronics business on Norfolk Island.

The Jim Smith DXpeditions are usually balanced with 50% CW and 50% SSB. His major operations over the past decade have included; VR4BJ from the Solomon Islands in 1977 where he made 5,800 contacts: VK9YS from Cocos-Keeling in 1978 with 9,700 contacts: C21AA from Nauru in 1979 with 9,700 contacts: T3KJ from Kiribati in 1979 with 1,200 QSOs: VK9NS from Norfolk Island in 1980 with 9,800 contacts: VK9NS/LH from Lord Howe Island in 1980 with 1,500 contacts: ZM7JS from Tokelau Island in 1981 with 10,500 contacts: 5W1DG from Western Samoa with 5,800 contacts: 9M8JS from Sarawak in 1982 with 5,500 contacts: and VK0JS from Heard Island in 1983 with 14,500 contacts. Other callsigns used by Jim during his long DX career were CAR from Car Nicobar in 1948-49: VS1BQ from Singapore from 1947-51: G3HSR from the UK from 1951 until his son received this call in 1983: DL2TH from the British Zone of Germany in 1952-57: HZ1AB (guest operator) Saudi Arabia 1963-64: MP4BER from Bahrain 1963-64: 9V1PR from Singapore 1968-71: P29JS from Papua New Guinea present day: H44BJ 1976 present day: ZL0AAB, a temporary call in New Zealand, in 1981: and ZL1BUN from New Zealand from 1981-84.

He was accompanied on his DXpedition to Cocos-Keeling in 1979 by F6CYL and by his wife Kirsti, VK9NL to Western Samoa in 1982, and Sarawak in 1982 and to Heard Island in 1983. Kirsti's callsigns for these DXpeditions were 5W1DK, 9M8NL, and for Heard Island VK0NL.

The Jim Smith Pacific DX Net, which he ran every night from Papua New Guinea on 14220 kHz using a crystal-controlled rig, handled over 150,000 transactions prior to 1984. At one time Jim had counted over 265 countries which had checked into this net.

CQ Magazine received three nominations from three separate DXers proposing P29JS/VK9NS for the DX Hall of Fame. These were Bob Winn, W5KNE, editor of QRZ DX; Alan Leith, VE3FRA/VE1AL, past editor of the DX Report; and Dr. Sanford E. Hutson, K5YY, who is himself a member of the DX Hall of Fame. In supporting Jim Smith's election to the Hall of Fame, Committee Member Hugh Cassidy, WA6AUD, commented, "Jim Smith has continued to be active as a DXer quite literally for decades. He has never tired of operating and DXing. He is consistent."

Congratulations to Jim Smith, P29JS/VK9NS, DX Hall of Fame.

On return to Norfolk Island many weeks later, I did some research into the background of the CQ Hall of Fame Award. Here is a list of the DXers who had previously attained this wonderful award:

Gus Browning, W4BPD March 23, 1968	John Cummings, W2CTN November 11, 1968.,
Stewart S. Perry, W1BB August 16, 1968.	Richard C. Spenceley, KV4AA March 11, 1969.
Danny Weil, VP2VP September 15, 1969.	H. Dale Strieter,W4DQS May 23, 1970.
Stuart Meyer, W2GHK, October 31, 1970.	Martii Laine, OH2BH January 22, 1972.
Ted Thorpe, ZK4AWJ, and Chuck Swain, KL7MU August 6, 1972.	C.J. (Joe) Hiller, W4OPM March 30, 1973.
Ernst Krenkel, RAEM April 14, 1974.	Frank Anzalone, W1WY June 19, 1976.
Lloyd, W6KG, and Iris Colvin, W6QL November 12, 1976.	Geoff Watts, Editor and Publisher, June 11, 1976.
Don C. Wallace, W6AM September 23, 1978	Joe Arcure Jr, W3HNK December 1, 1979.
Hugh Cassidy, WA6AUD April 26, 1981.	Eric A. Sjolund, SM0AGD April 21st, 1981
Franz Langner, DJ9ZB May 9, 1982.	Dr. Sanford E. Hutson K5YY, January 22, 1983.
Rodney H. Newkirk, W9BRD February 25, 1984.	Ron W. Wright, ZL1AMO April 20, 1985.
Herb Becke, W6QD April 20. 1985.	Jim Smith, P29JS, VK9NS April 26, 1986.

It is many years now since I was presented with my Hall of Fame plaque at the Dayton HamVention. I still recall the long walk down the hall, to the front of the assembled DXers to receive the beautiful plaque - a wonderful moment and memory in my Amateur Radio life.

We had met hundreds of radio amateurs and DXers. They were a wonderful group and we enjoyed a great weekend of hospitality, questions and comments.

At Dayton, we had been invited by Don Search, W3AZD, Communications Manager, in charge of administering the ARRL DXCC programme, to visit ARRL HQ in Connecticut. George, K2ON, living in White Plains, NY, one of our HIDXA Life members, had kindly invited us to stay with him for a few days. If one thought about it very quickly, Hartford didn't seem to be all that far from White Plains! So we accepted both of the invitations.

After a final goodbye to all, Kirsti and I were on our way to New York. The flight to New York was uneventful and we duly arrived on schedule; another leg of our journey had become a reality. George, K2ON was there to meet us and he drove us to his home in White Plains. We were both soon settled in very comfortable surroundings, and we now had some planning to do, for the ARRL HQ trip!

Over the local VHF repeater system, around the New York/Connecticut area, arrangements were finalised for the visit to ARRL. Kirsti and I would make our own way to Danbury (about half way between White Plains and Hartford). Paul, KB1BE, (an HIDXA Member) would come down to pick us up and drive us on the remaining leg to the ARRL.

A Visit to the ARRL Headquarters, in Hartford, Connecticut. - April 1986.

Every thing had gone well. Paul, KB1BE picked us up as arranged and we were soon on our way to the ARRL. Spring had arrived with a vengeance and the country-side was glorious. The road systems are superb and, before we knew it, we were pulling into the car park of the ARRL HQ. Here we saw ample evidence of Amateur Radio activity, with several imposing antennas around. The entrance to the main Office building had a flowering cherry in full bloom.

The immediate entrance to the two-storied building has a big area with reception desk and several large glass cabinets. My attention was soon caught by the wonderful collection of older radio goodies. Coils, capacitors, Morse keys and various items of wireless equipment were on display, a record of the radio activities of yesteryear.

Next to the reception desk was a large selection of the ARRL Publications, an immediate feeling of wanting to buy an *ARRL Handbook or an Antenna Handbook* was quickly curbed. We had both long adjusted to looking and not buying; we still had a long journey ahead of us.

Don Search, W3AZD, was showing Kirsti and me around, and it was noticeable that everyone was very friendly. Many of the staff in the various departments had callsigns, and many had worked Kirsti or me on the ham bands. Considerable interest was expressed about Norfolk Island and we did our best to answer the various questions being asked

QSL Bureau/Mail Room

One of the first offices visited was the ARRL QSL Bureau and Don was quick to dig out cards for both Kirsti and myself. We had to decline the idea of carrying several pounds of QSL cards back to Norfolk Island; they were the last thing we needed. The QSL bureau system is well set up. It has to be as they deal in QSL cards by the thousands, both on an incoming and an outgoing basis. Outgoing cards are sent to the various sub-managers of the USA Call

Areas. On an International basis, out-going mail is sent to the various international QSL bureaus. In all, a huge quantity of mail passes through on a continual basis.

Shortly after, we were in an office area where artwork was being prepared for an ARRL publication. The office wall-board carried many examples of previous work. Front covers for that old standard, the *ARRL Amateur Radio Handbook,* are an example of material which was on display.

We stopped and chatted with John, W1XX (Operating News), and Chas, K0CH, (one of the Technical Editors) All sported the 'One of the ARRL Headquarters Gang' distinctive, QSL card style, name tag.

In the laboratory I was interested in the wide range of test equipment and the well equipped bench areas. Here the latest pet project is being committed to a full blown technical article in QST. The project was checked and tested so that it may be built with confidence by Mr or Mrs Average Ham. I remembered the many QST rigs and bits and pieces I had built over the years.

HQ Station WIAW

We made our way to the separate building which houses the HQ Station, W1AW. From here the daily ARRL Bulletins are transmitted world wide. These dedicated (band, mode) stations are very impressive, and excellent antenna systems make sure that the best possible signal is radiated.

Station layout in the sundry areas and operating positions take care of the various modes and bands. Separate amplifiers for the different bands avoid the need for continual band switching. In short, an engineer's approach to a complete, multi band, Amateur Radio station.

Normally, a visiting radio amateur is invited to operate the W1AW station, but whilst we were there, it was inconvenient to operate any of the stations; a full-blown TV interview was in progress.

DXCC Desk

It was time to get over to the DXCC area and find out what was happening there. As an avid DXer and the holder of several DXCC Certificates from several countries, I was keen on the idea of seeing for myself what happened at the DXCC desk.

Don Search, W3AZD, had been administering the ARRL DXCC programme for several years. It is not an easy task to please everyone; sometimes the politics of the DXCC programme can be daunting. Don was therefore responsible for implemented the ARRL DXCC policy; he did not make the decision on whether some 'country' activity should count, or not.

There have been many changes made within the DXCC scene over the years. In my view, the status or integrity of the ARRL DXCC Award is above reproach. The DXCC programme is on-going and continually being measured and monitored to give the best service to an often complicated picture. It was very interesting to be in the DXCC area for the first time.

On looking over Don's personal collection of his DXCC cards displayed in the office, several of his QSL cards took me back many years. The Burma, XZ2TH, QSL is a rare one those days. Was it really all those years since I had chased many of those same stations? I noticed the QSL cards from Rashid, YK1AA and Father Moran, 9N1MM both countries, single operator stations with high activity. You will have your own memories. I thought of my own QSL cards going through the DXCC process. I had claimed DXCC from several callsigns over the years.

I have always found the DXCC programme exciting.

The usual prompt and courteous service is always there and, in due course, the DXCC Certificate is on the wall. One knows that his country total is valid and measured against all DXers. We thanked Don and the DXCC staff for a couple of pleasant hours.

My advice in those days, to all budding DXers, was to get those DXCC cards sorted out and get them off to ARRL DXCC. You will soon receive that first DXCC Certificate, and I extend my congratulations, you are now a member of the DXCC gang.

The material for this chapter was written many years ago and to say that things have changed at DXCC would have to be an understatement. The computer has taken all the 'leg work' out of card checking, and being able to have ones cards checked at the various Amateur Radio gatherings is a major improvement. No more sleepless nights wondering if your DXCC QSL cards will arrive back safely!

These days there is the ARRL Log Book of the World which allows thousands of QSOs to be claimed from the computer screen, and payment of the usual processing charges carried out on line. It is a different game altogether as many DXers search for instant gratification. Nowadays, many DXpeditions post their logs on line. In these cases DXers can look on line to check if the QSO has been logged. One thing does remain, set in concrete; one still has to work that needed DX station to be able to make a DXCC claim.

We said our goodbyes to the ARRL staff and headed back to

White Springs in a reverse repeat of our trip there. We had a marathon return journey to White Plains and the home of George, K2ON. After our goodbyes to Paul, KB1BE at Danbury we continued by taxi back to White Plains, but there the driver could not find George's address. We drove around for ages. Finally, we got lucky; one if the members of a working roadside crew produced a map of the area. The driver soon knew where to go, and dropped us off (quite exhausted) at our destination at 2 am.

Our next commitment was with the LIDXA Group. The DX members took us in hand, and we were soon settled in Greenwich Village. Here, accommodation had been arranged for the remainder of our stay in New York. At the LIDXA meeting that evening, we met the other members (we had already met several at Dayton) and at this meeting a motion was passed making us both Life Members of the LIDXA. We had a very nice evening with the group and have kept in touch over the years.

During the remainder of our stay we were shown around this wonderful city. These days, we both recall our visit to the ill fated Twin Towers. The view from the top had been an awesome sight and experience.

Kirsti was more familiar with the general area of NYC as she had been there a couple of times during her seafaring days. For me, this was my first view of the Statue of Liberty.

Our time for departure had arrived and we were taken to JFK Airport where we made our final goodbyes before boarding the London flight.

Europe

My two eldest sons Bruce and Stuart met us at Heathrow and after some basic introductions we headed for Stuart's home in Reading. This was an easy trip of an hour or so using the motorway. Once at Stuart's we continued catching up with updates of family news. There, after loads of discussion, a brief outline of our plans for our stay was decided. Bruce, who worked for IBM, was currently based in London and he was able to offer the use of his house in Hursley, quite close to Reading/London. In short a very convenient location as, in addition, the motorway to the west was within easy access. Stuart was in a position to lend me the use a BMW car – a major plus which certainly allowed for much easier planning of our intended travels.

We soon settled into Bruce's house in Hursley, which was about 2 hours drive from Stuart's house. In a nice quiet village area with a couple of local shops, we would be comfortable and not starve! From there it would be easy to show Kirsti around and enable her to meet my family, who, to say the least, was scattered around! For example, it would be relatively easy to get to Chepstow in south Wales, where my daughter Sheena lived. A mere couple of hours drive down the A4 motor way, across the Severn Bridge, into Chepstow, at the other end.

My youngest son Fraser and family lived in the Birmingham (Midlands) area and, again, this was very easy to reach by road. The visit was something that we could do during the trip to Scotland. There we would meet up with my other relatives and give Kirsti the opportunity to see something of north east Scotland. It would require a longish road trip, spread over a couple of weeks, to touch base with everyone.

Whilst in England, we also had a commitment with the newly formed Chiltern DX Club. We were entertained by the group and at this meeting I was elected as an honorary membership of the club. In those days I had been licensed as a G station for over 30 years.

In the UK, life became something of a marathon with much to do. From our base in Hursley we made our way to the motorway, and a couple of hours later (driving west), we crossed the Severn Bridge into Wales. Not long after, we arrived at Sheena's house in Chepstow, a delightful village. There we had a great welcome and they had made arrangements to put us up. After the usual introductions we played catch up on the news, as it had been some time since I had last seen Sheena.

Later the next morning we departed from Chepstow, making the trip up the beautiful and renowned Wye valley en route for the Birmingham. Once there, and after a bit of a hassle, I found the house where my youngest son Fraser and wife lived. It was great to make all the introductions and it seemed ages since Fraser had stayed with me in P.N.G. during a summer vacation. The years had flown along, and Fraser was now busy with extensive alterations to the recently purchased house.

From Birmingham we continued on our way to Scotland. This was a longish drive, heading for Duns, Berwickshire, in the border area of Scotland/England. My father, now a pensioner lived in a sheltered home complex where all had individual accommodation. He was delighted to see me and, of course, Kirsti. It had been a long time since he and I had last met. He could not put us up, but we were able to get into a nice Bed and Breakfast house in the vicinity. During our stay we went out for a meal and a look around Duns which is a small town.

From Duns we headed for Aberdeen and this gave me an ideal opportunity to call into my aunt Mary's place (she ran the local post office) in Long Formacus. She had always been a favourite of mine, a real down to earth no nonsense character. I find it amazing to be able to write that she is still alive and now over 100 years old. Now there is fortitude for you. We had a warm welcome, with the immediate offer to stay a couple of days ("Bide a while!"). We had to decline though, and, shortly after continued our journey up to Aberdeen now just over 120 miles away.

Once in Aberdeen, I was, of course, back home, in a way, although my mother had died some time ago. I was able to show Kirsti around my old stomping grounds as a wartime teenager. Kirsti is several years younger than I, but she, too, had wartime experiences.

We continued up to what is called Royal Deeside, a magnificent area of beauty hugging the River Dee almost all the way to its source. The journey took us through Cults, Cuter, Aboyne and Ballater and on to Braemar. This is a famous highland town, linked to the Scottish Highland games, tossing the caber, Highland dancing, and other activities. We had a good look around Braemar and made a side trip to the Lynn of Dee. Here the river is much narrower, and the salmon have to jump the fast flowing water fall. Once up over the fall they make their way to the spawning grounds at the head to the Dee.

Our journey back, heading south from Braemar took us over the famous Devils Elbow (these days now bypassed!) down into the Pitlochry area. On our journey we had been surrounded by gorse and heather and the splendour of the mountain sides.

In truth, I was actually showing off to Kirsti. I had done this whole trip by bicycle in my teens during the wartime years. My bike was scrounged and built from various bits and pieces garnished from here and there. It became a remarkably good machine, and it cut its teeth on the roughly 200 mile trip of Aberdeen/Pitlochry and return. That Braemar/Pitlochry section over the famous Devil's Elbow: and I can confirm it is easier going down than cycling back up, on my return journey to Aberdeen.

Finally after literally hundreds of miles of road travel from Scotland down through England we were nearing Bruce's home in Hursley again. We had only a few days left of our UK stay and we were satisfied with what we had done. The car leant by Stuart had made a huge difference, making us independent of buses or trains. It did the journey without a hiccup, and I think it was rather pleased with itself.

From Heathrow we flew to Norway. Several of the LA-hams met us at the Oslo Airport and Tore, LA7ZO took us in hand for our overnight stay We drove to his holiday lodge where we spent a pleasant evening catching up on amateur radio in general. Next morning Tore drove us back to the airport where we boarded the plane for the flight to

Bardufoss and from there we travelled north to Kirsti's home in Narvik, above the Artic Circle. Initially we stayed with her sister and brother-in law who lived about 80 miles north of Narvik. After a couple of days they drove us to Narvik where the bulk of Kirsti's relatives lived. It was therefore easy to visit this or that cousin, school friends, and so forth. Living on Norfolk Island had meant limited travel for Kirsti to Norway over the years.

We also made a few trips in the area, including one by road, over the border, into Sweden. This was a very interesting trip through some dramatic country side.

In Narvik, Kirsti's mother was able to accommodate us. She lived in the middle of the town which meant all of Narvik was within easy reach, and we hoofed around during our stay. I should mention that Narvik and Norway itself has a special significance to me as a Scot. More to the point, I had lived only a few hundred miles, across the North Sea, almost within spitting distance of Norway. In war time, we had been closely tied, and Aberdeen offered a safe refuge for the royal family during this terrible era.

Soon we were heading back down south to Oslo with a stop over at an old friend of Kirsti's in the south western part of Norway. It was quite different from Narvik; a very pleasant rural farming type area. We had a very nice stay there; I remember the strawberries in particular, huge and delicious.

We had a commitment in Oslo to attend the annual meeting of the LA DX Association. They had made arrangements for our accommodation at the SAS hotel. We attended the meeting and each of us gave a small presentation of slides and accompanying chat. One matter of business during the annual meeting was making us both life members of the group. In later years, HIDXA was able to assist in a substantial financial way with their DXpedition to remote Peter 1 Island. We stayed in Oslo a couple of days and were able to get around, in true tourist fashion.

From there we caught a train to Kristiansand to catch a ferry for Denmark. There, we were met by Max, OZ7BO who put us up for a couple of days. From there we headed for Copenhagen, where we attended a meeting of the OZ group and gave our talk and slide shows. We had an excellent time. Various members of the group made sure that we visited the important areas of Copenhagen. We saw Little Mermaid who for some reason was looking at a couple of submarines along side the nearby wharf; a must see tourist destination and also visited Tivoli Park, a world famous area of the city.

The time flashed by and we departed Copenhagen for Heathrow. There would be a few more short days of goodbyes to my family before departing for Sydney, via New Delhi and Hong Kong.

At Heathrow, it was agreed by all that it had been a most successful trip, and our new family connections were now firmly established. We said our goodbyes and, shortly after, boarded the plane for New Delhi. Our arrival there was very straightforward, after a slight entry visa hiccup which immigration cleared up. We then caught the airport bus to our hotel, where we booked in and relaxed. One immediate impression on that drive was two fold, first the heat and then the sheer volume of people and activities around us.

At the Sheraton hotel we made arrangements for a trip to Agra and the Taj Mahal, several hours drive away. The trip, there and back, would take a whole day. I can safely say that it was another one of those ‘must see’ locations, with an endless stream of visitors. The busy road to Agra threads its way through a steady stream of humanity passing before one’s eyes. We had a couple of stops on the way at this or that shopping area. At one stop, an elephant was available for rides as a tourist attraction, and Kirsti looked down on the world as she travelled around the place on the elephants back. This is called 'going up in the world.'

After a journey of a few hours (about 100 miles) we arrived at Agra and joined the stream of visitors to this remarkable place. We had perfect weather and the Taj Mahal lived up to its reputation. It is a building of incredible beauty. It overwhelms one's senses into one of sheer tranquillity and amazement. I have no real recollection of the immediate surroundings, just a feeling of being transfixed by the beauty of this magnificent structure. We did our share of tourist style walking around taking photographs, but time passed quickly, and regrettably we had to make a move to head back to New Delhi.

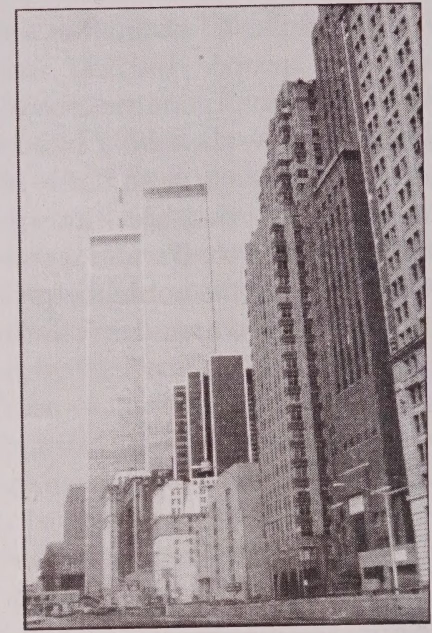
On our way back to town, the mandatory stops en route enabled us to buy more souvenirs. In addition to the usual trinkets, we purchased (after the usual haggling!) a beautiful hand woven, silk bed spread. Towards the end of the trip, we had one final stop and there we were offered a cold soft drink. I had a bottle of orange, but Kirsti declined. We were now a relatively short trip away from the hotel. After a very welcome shower and cleanup, we headed down for a drink in the lounge before our evening meal. Later we went for a walk around the immediate hotel area, all in perfect safety.

It was next morning, at breakfast, that I began to feel queasy. I had toast and coffee, but that was it. We were due to depart for Hong Kong later in the day, where we would have a brief stop over before catching an over night flight to Sydney. This would connect us with the Norfolk Island flight next morning.

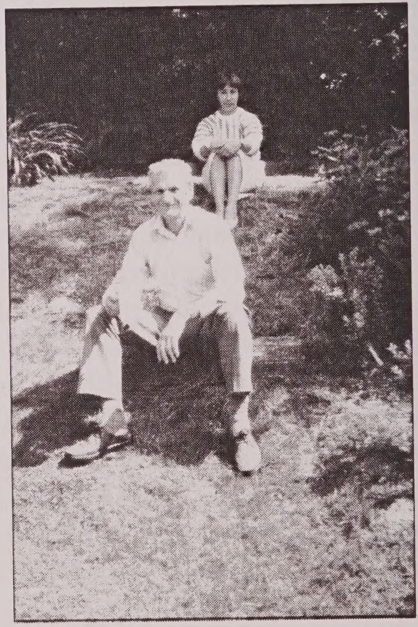
In the evening, and next day in Hong Kong, I continued to feel very uncomfortable. I normally have the constitution of an ox, been there, done that, but not this time. I am not joking when I say that I barely made it back to Norfolk Island. I had hardly sneezed during the whole of our extended trip but now something had definitely got me.

On arrival on Norfolk, I headed for the hospital and there received some proper medical attention. I was diagnosed with an advanced genuine case of Delhi Belly, a rare tropical disease! A few days later I had recovered and felt fine. The moral is; never trust a bottle of orange drink served in one of these roadside stores. I had drunk something made by using a local water source and a sleight of hand (pretended to open the bottle) before serving.

In short, don't drink the water, drink the beer!



The Twin Towers New York, 1986.

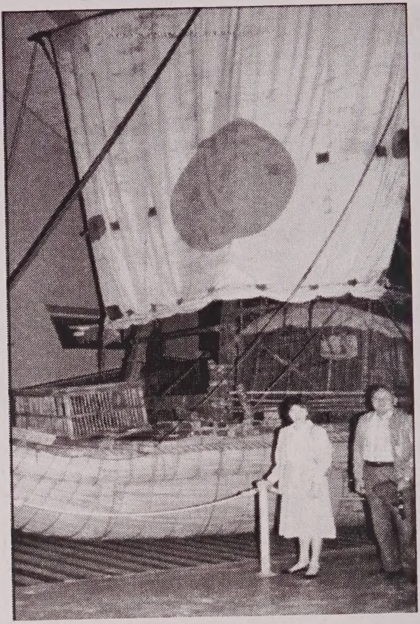


Jim and Kirsti, Bruce's house, England 1986.

Jim, Kirsti and two of my sons Bruce (eldest) and Stuart.

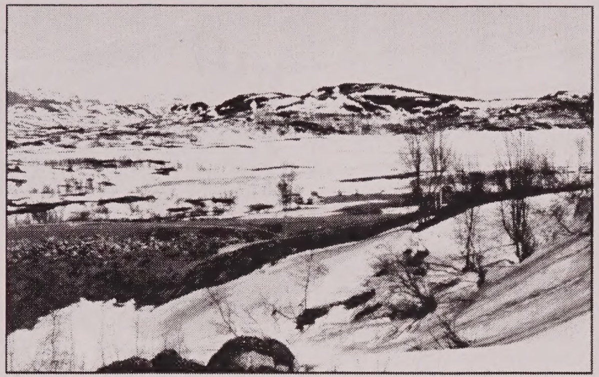
My Father (with HIDXA T shirt) and me. Duns, 1986.

Jim, Kirsti and Ragnar in Oslo, 1986.



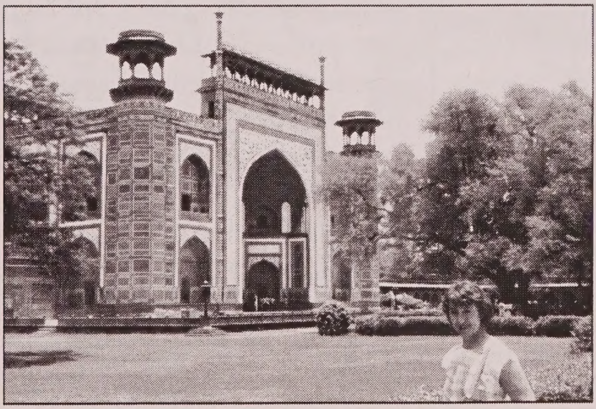
The Kon–Tiki expedition raft, Oslo, 1986.

Kirsti and family in Narvik.



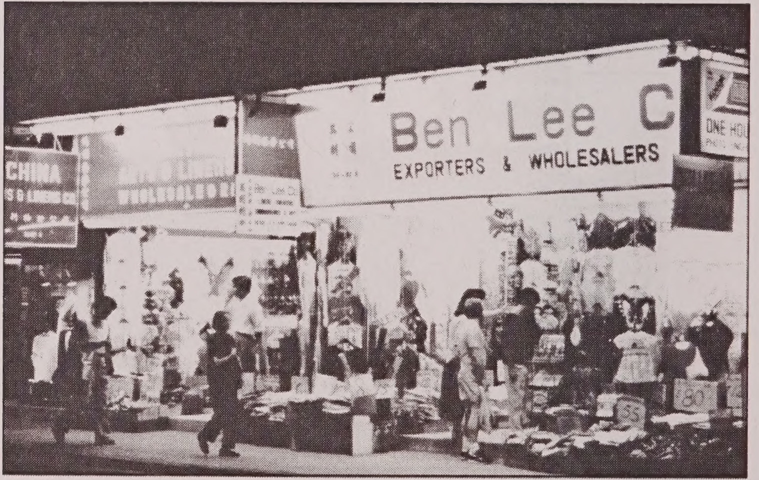
Bjoernfjell, Norway 68.27 North. Narvik-Sweden road.

Indian snake charmer outside our hotel. India 1996.



Kirsti outside entrance to the Taj Mahal. Agra, 1986.

Down-town Hong Kong during our visit in 1986.


Ben Lee C
EXPORTERS & WHOLESALERS
CHINA

The famous night markets of Hong Kong 1986.

Chapter 16

DXPEDITION TO COCOS (KEELING)

VK9YS and VK9YW 10 February – 23 February 1987

The opportunity to re-visit Cocos (Keeling) Islands arose quite suddenly and was the result of a telephone call by Cres, VK9YC, from Perth. He is the son-in-law of the famed John Clunies-Ross whose family home had been Oceania House, Home Island for generations.

In his telephone call Cres, who had been very active from Home Island a couple of years previously, indicated that he had the idea of forming a new radio club VK9YY based on Home Island. The club would have all the usual Amateur Radio amenities, including several operating positions and antennas covering all bands. The stations would provide real DX capability, with RTTY and other special modes being added later. Visiting radio amateurs would then be able to utilise these facilities (subject to the usual regulations) and thus experience the thrill of being a DX station. The actual radio location in a rare DX location sitting atop a huge salt water table would give excellent results. He asked if I would be interested in accompanying him on the project to help get things started. I would have plenty of time to operate as he had left some equipment there. I was very tempted, but I was reluctant to do so for two reasons: firstly a good friend of mine, Bob Winn, W5KNE, had been keen to take part in a DXpedition and we had been thinking about Cocos (Keeling). It would be good if he could join me for a visit to the islands. Unfortunately neither of us could meet the almost immediate time frame that Cres had in mind. Bob only had a certain time slot available which was inflexible. My other reason was the little matter of the upcoming operation from Peter I Island and the possibility of it being active whilst I was on Home Island. No, if I was to work that ultra-rare 3Y station, it would have to be as VK9NS on Norfolk Island.

However, with any luck we could be Cres's first customers!

So it was that Cres went to Cocos (Keeling) in his available time whilst Bob and I waited and firmed up on our dates. The idea was that we would get to Home Island after Cres had left, and then shortly after would walk in, connect the rigs, and operate!

Ever notice how often "the best laid schemes o' mice and men" (as Robert Burns wrote), "*gang aft agley*". The telephone rang and at the other end Cres was calling from Cocos (Keeling) and I swear he was almost in tears. His two weeks slog of climbing towers, chopping down trees, hanging antennas, assembling an 8 element log periodic and assembling and rigging a 70ft lattice tower, had ended in near disaster.

The tower, complete with heavy duty rotator and beam had been raised almost vertical. In a twinkling, something had sheared and down came the tower, rather quicker than it had gone up. It was a miracle that nobody had been maimed.

Cres detailed the situation: "Call the whole thing off," he suggested. Perhaps, in a few months time he could go back and try again to get things organised. As we discussed the situation, it seemed that things were maybe not too bad.

The tower had not been severely damaged, in fact he had almost finished repairing it; a few more hours of welding should fix things. The beam was a mess, but all the main damage was to the back section of the boom and last two elements and he thought he could get a complete back section sent up from Perth on the next plane.

So Cres had carried on, repaired the tower and had removed the mangled back section of the log periodic antenna. That is how Bob and I eventually found it, silently awaiting a bit more work and that new back section.

Meanwhile I was successful in working the 3Y, and I set out for Perth, where John, VK6JJ, had agreed to meet me at Perth Airport and help me get around during my short stop-over. Since the plane was due to arrive at 3:30am, it was decided not to stretch the bounds of friendship too far. John would meet me at around 7:30 am, which seemed a more reasonable time of day. The plane arrived on time; I had travelled via Sydney and Alice Springs, a distance of some 4,000 km, plus the Norfolk/Sydney leg of around 1000km. My luggage was quickly available in an almost deserted terminal.

I soon had all my cases and boxes except for one item! I waited in vain for the YAESU FL2100Z amplifier box to appear on the carousel. A rather pretty girl close by was going through a similar nail biting routine and exhibiting the usual stress symptoms. I was feeling much the same, as we both duly presented ourselves at the traffic counter. We both filled out forms with details of the lost items; however, it soon became clear that our lost baggage had been off-loaded at Alice Springs.

I hope the girl did better than I, as my package never arrived in time for my departure. I was well on my way to Cocos (Keeling) before it finally reached Perth, via Melbourne!

John arrived as promised and although we had never met before, we quickly became friends. We made a start on dealing with the various matters which had to be done. It looked as though we had another major hiccup; John and I had called in to the hotel to pick up Bob, but the receptionist said that although Mr. Winn had a booking, he had not shown up! Reactions were immediate and predictable: "What the h... had happened to Bob; waylaid in Hawaii by hula-hula girls, missed his plane, changed his mind?"

Now, regardless, a start had to be made to get my own travel arrangements finalised. First call was a courtesy visit to the Department of Communications (DOC) to inform them of my intended activity from Cocos (Keeling) using my callsign VK9YS and, two weeks later, from Christmas Island, using my current VK9XS callsign. Next, I had to get my Cocos (Keeling) visa, buy my plane ticket, make a trip to the airport to collect my amplifier package (I should be so lucky) and finally try to ensure that my 100kg of luggage travelled on the same plane as I was on.

This is a good time to mention that Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands were in those days served on a weekly basis by a government charter service - Perth, Cocos (Keeling) then to Christmas Island one week. The following week the schedule was Perth, Christmas Island, on to Cocos (Keeling). Government requirements have first call on all the available freight capability. Excess baggage had a low priority, easily left behind for more important freight. A possibility existed therefore of my baggage being off-loaded thus creating the perfect DXpedition scenario: Operators on Cocos (Keeling) and equipment in Perth!

I digress; DOC for licensing was the next priority. Our arrival at DOC held a surprise: there was Bob, with outstretched hand. "Glad you could make it"! Then John and I explained that, according to his hotel, he had not arrived in Perth. Bob gave his opinion of the said hotel! He explained that on arrival, he had telephoned the hotel. The receptionist had told him that he didn't have a reservation and, that in any case, that they had no vacancies. John and I grinned at each other; this just might end up as another of those days.

Next in line was the visa requirement and John drove us over to the Department of Territories Office in downtown Perth. There we had no problems since we were both listed for the flight departing the next morning. Our passports were handed over and were then duly returned with the necessary visa stamp. To travel to Cocos (Keeling) one needed an invitation, a visa, a return ticket and a return entry permit for Australia. Not necessarily in that order!

The charter ticket took a little longer. Cash was the order of the day - no credit cards acceptable - so Bob had to go bank hunting. In my own case, I carried Australian traveller's cheques, and they were acceptable. However, I rocked the system slightly; after my stay on Cocos (Keeling) I wanted to have a week stop-over on Christmas Island before travelling back to Australia. As it happened, the mathematics of it all was too much. I ended up by being overcharged, although this was corrected when I received a refund some weeks later on Norfolk Island.

The next headache was our baggage. If at all possible, our excess baggage should go via cargo rate. This was some 50% cheaper than the excess baggage rate. There was some friendly bartering, but, shortly after, everything was paid for and left at the freight department. We had a firm okay that the baggage would be on our plane leaving the next morning. There was, however, no sign of that lost amplifier package at the airport.

The rest of the day was spent relaxing (strange word). Back at John's place I sat listening to him working his way up the available hierarchy of the airline company, trying to get a firm promise for delivery of the missing linear. The package had actually been located - in Melbourne! It was finally delivered, by taxi, to John's house some two hours after we had left Perth.

There was a distinct 'what if' scenario over the amplifier, so I made a suggestion to John. My amplifier is new and unused – I would swap it with him for his amplifier which happened to be the same model!!

Next morning the VK6JJ shack looked empty, as John removed his YAESU, FL2100Z linear amplifier which was then wrapped in an old bed cover for maximum protection. It would be carry-on hand baggage! John meanwhile threatened me with a fate worse than death: "If you lose it, break it, bend it, or otherwise damage it... I will be very annoyed!" or words to that effect! Seriously though, many thanks John, it is not the easiest thing in the world to lend one's ham gear. Without his generosity the DXpedition would have been far less successful.

Next morning, Bob and I were checking in and the girl behind the counter was very brusque and un-smiling. Efficiently, she took my two tickets and passport, and proceeded to tear the flight coupons out of both. It had been difficult to ask her "What are you doing?", as her look and reaction to my question had me frozen to the floor. It was quite obvious that I was very stupid to tell her that she had just removed my means of getting back to Australia from Christmas Island. Not to be outdone, she asked, "Why had I given her two tickets"? When I pointed out that she had to ensure that I had a return ticket, things only got worse.

Whichever way one looks at things, one never really learns. It was a tactical blunder of the highest order. Suddenly various rules and regulations were rigorously enforced – just for me! My hand luggage had to be no more than 4kg. The excess baggage, including the linear, was calculated to the nearest three decimal points and so on. But, finally, we were on our way, and I think Bob was looking forward to a normal life again.

The flight to Cocos (Keeling) is a leg of about 2,700km, and it turned out to be very comfortable and pleasant. All the hassles of the last few days were behind us, and Bob and I caught up on reading and talking DX. Finally, our destination was near, and we reached for our cameras in readiness.

We were soon looking at the Cocos (Keeling) atoll below, clicking away with our cameras. When one considers that the atoll is only 10 feet above sea level, it is easily understood why it used to be so difficult to find when arriving by sea. In the old days it was often the appearance of birds making their way home at sunset that led the way. Things are much easier these days with satellite navigation and computer controlled flight paths as these remote destinations appear dead-ahead on track.

A partial fly-over showed the beauty of the lagoon and the weather side of steady surf in great detail. The colour range is tremendous, ranging from white to deep dark purple, with all the range of blues and turquoise in between. Soon, we were at the terminal, and John and Vicky Clunies-Ross were there to meet us. We all adjourned to the community recreation hall to do some more relaxing. We also had a wait ahead of us, as formalities were completed and baggage and cargo unloaded.

An hour or so later our normal baggage was available, and we then made a visit to the cargo shed to collect our released 'cargo'. After loading it all onto John's truck we were on our way. Soon, we were at the jetty on the lagoon side of West Island and we had an 8km trip across the lagoon ahead of us. Another unloading and loading session had everything aboard the launch *Merdeka* and we were soon on our way to Home Island. It brought back memories, as I had been on this journey before back in 1979.

On arrival, the ham gear was carried to the ham shack area and our various personal belongings lodged in our respective bedrooms in Oceania house. It looked as though

VK9YS and VK9YW would be a reality soon.

First priority was, of course, where is the shack? The next couple of days and almost every day of our stay were spent in setting up the facilities of the club. It became apparent that despite the efforts of Cres and John in previous weeks, there was still a lot to do.

The large, brick-built building was over 100 years old, and had served many purposes in its life. More recently, it had been a school for the Cocos Malay children of Home Island. Four or five largish airy classrooms were on the second floor, various store rooms being on the ground floor below. Each of the old classrooms had power points and a couple of them had a large substantial table, ideal for the rig, keyer, linear and logbook. Bob and I decided to operate in separate rooms and quickly made a simple rule: No band change without notification to the other. This is the best insurance I know to avoid us operating on the same band and possible damage to each others receivers. It was a good decision as often I was on SSB and Bob on CW, or vice-versa. There was little distraction to operating, unless one counts the lagoon outside and the swaying palm trees!

Outside, one 60 foot tower carried an 18/30MHz, 7 element log periodic (about 3 or 4 years old). Several other antennas were anchored to the tower at a lower level. A 40m loop and a full sized G5RV were also available; use was made of the school building and trees to tie off the ends. The other end of the 5RV ended in another nearby tree. The other tower lay on the ground at right angles to the building, and eventually would have to be raised.

Neither of us had problems in assembling our respective stations. I had brought my ICOM 740 (last used on Heard Island) and soon had my station ready to go. The operating position proved to be very comfortable. There was plenty of room as after all, we had a large classroom each! However, it soon became apparent that grounding was a problem and that being on the second floor was not the best idea. We took control immediately, and a couple of hours later we had improved the ground system by using two 6 foot galvanised star pickets. These were driven in the ground by John using a power shovel. Short heavy-duty wires connected this ground up to each operating position.

Later we realised that the 18/30MHz log periodic beam was quite useless. John climbed the tower and we soon had this small beam on the ground. In the seven elements we found at least 10 disconnected sections, and we also discovered that the balun was a mess, which at least confirmed the diagnosis. Some hours later, all of the element sections had been pulled apart, cleaned and reassembled. In addition, the old badly-corroded balun was discarded. I opted for the old and reliable coax RF choke technique to feed the beam. Soon after, the beam was on the tower again pointing to the North and an immediate pile-up was the result! In fact, thousands of contacts were made on this beam on 15m, and, in addition, many were made on 10m. Its limitation was now the lack of 20m capability and lack of a rotator.

As the days passed, we made hundreds of contacts and the total number of stations worked increased dramatically. In an early QSO, John confirmed that his 'new' amplifier was up and running and that he was happy with the swap (I still have John's amplifier here on Norfolk Island).

Both of us stuck to the same frequencies each time whichever bands we worked. There was quite a bit of mutual interference, mainly due to antenna coupling, as all the antennas led back to the same mast. But, slowly, other improvements were made. We increased the antenna separation, and a 20m dipole was erected by Bob. I had already built a 20m ground plane and mounted it on the roof of the building.

Over the days I climbed the tower again and again, gradually working my way through the defunct 'Armstrong' rotating system, freeing and greasing each bearing point. Finally, we had a beam which could be manually turned through about 300 degrees, a vast improvement over the previous situation.

Meanwhile, we discovered that the parts (that rear section) for the other beam had not arrived with us as promised. An error had been made in Perth and the box had been delivered to the wrong cargo shed (this has a familiar sound to it!). Despite this error, the beam parts duly arrived on the aircraft the following week, along with 100 metres of new coax cable.

Throughout the week we also checked the rigging of the other tower; we connected guy wires to the mast and these were laid out on the ground ready for connection to the guying pickets. Saturday was tower-raising day. The beam was not ready, but that could not be helped. The raising of the tower complete with the front half beam and the rotator would be a simple exercise. This time there would be plenty of people, adequate guying and a power vehicle to pull the mast vertical.

John and I had our first moment of disagreement as I did not like the idea of having that 'half beam' on top. I felt that the stress would be considerable, due to the gross unbalance. It would also be impossible to mate the two sections of the boom when the back section became available on Tuesday.

John, however, was confident that it could be done, and so a couple of hours later the tower was vertical. All that remained was the matter of tying off the guys, tidying up, and collecting tools, while we looked forward to getting the other half of the beam. Meanwhile, a counter-weight was attached to balance the strain of the partial beam on the other half of the boom.

Having the other tower was a huge bonus, and in the coming days a further moving around of antennas enabled station separation (in an antenna sense) to be greatly increased. An 80m sloper was built, and the full-sized

G5RV was moved with its centre put at around 65 feet which worked very well. In addition, an inverted L for 160m was installed but it was not yet properly matched. By this time the operating routine was fairly well established.

The morning call to prayer for the Muslim Community of the Cocos Malay Kampong was a great wake up call. Almost every morning I appeared on 80m in time and ready for the short sunrise slot. Most mornings, when I switched on, people were already calling me. As possibly the only sour note of the whole operation, I must comment on the behaviour of the European stations on 80m. In retrospect, there was no real excuse. VK9YS had superb 160m and 80m capability with an experienced DX operator, and, yet, I was literally driven off the band on several occasions.

Split-frequency operation was often difficult, as several possible operating slots were occupied by various broadcast and other stations in the area. The VK license in those days only allowed for a tiny 5 kHz segment in this 80m band area. Still, despite it all, many low band QSOs were made. I was disappointed at the relatively low number of contacts with North and South America. There is a tremendous potential for low-band operation from this low-lying area surrounded by salt water. We had, in fact, the perfect ground plane.

The 160m band was very rewarding and much easier. On this band I used CW most of the time and it was very exciting for me to work countries like GM, SP, HR, GI, DL, and others on this band. There are those few magic minutes of sunrise propagation, followed by silence until the next morning. 40m was a good band, but I never found the secret combination that would let me work split frequency to the USA on SSB on a continuous basis. From 7150 kHz up, through the hundreds of broadcast stations, there was hardly a clear spot - I even tried listening around 7280 kHz one day. Maybe much of it was cross-modulation products in the receiver. However, I have always thought that the ICOM 740 was a pretty good performer in that respect.

RTTY operation was an amazing experience. Since I had acquired a computer a couple of years previously, my typing had improved dramatically. I could now use more than one finger! However, I was quite unready for the huge RTTY pile-ups, and I could have worked many more stations if the available time had not been so limited. Many DXers were very happy to work a new one on RTTY.

The back end of the beam arrived on the Tuesday plane, and Bob and I set to work to assemble the two element back section. As this section, with its much longer elements, grew in size, Bob and I realised we had a major undertaking on our hands. Without the sheer determination and physical strength of John, and the efforts of Bob and me, the beam would never have been completed. After two days of solid hard work and a great deal of frustration, on the final attempt, John lodged the back section of the boom into the existing front section. We held our breath. It took a couple of hours before the boom was completely mated, and as long again to undo a hiccup in the phasing lines. Finally, with the beam pointing to the North, the coax was plugged into the rig - and it sounded great! A quick SWR check found it was very flat across 20m, 15m and a great deal of 10m. It was going to be a handy antenna with today's solid-state transceivers.

During some previous work, I had discovered that the transformer in the beam controller had burned out. Brand new on switch-on, a burning smell and a blown fuse signalled trouble. I had already removed the transformer, stripped the low-voltage winding from the core. I counted the turns, ready to rewind if I could get some wire. John took it over to a friend over on West Island, who kindly rewound it, but, for some strange reason decided to test it. There was a loud bang, and a cloud of smoke. I asked John how his friend had tested it with no iron core fitted…!

I had seen a couple of old reel to reel recorders lying around, and, with John's permission, salvaged a power transformer. By applying 240 AC to the 190 volt (!) primary tap, from the secondary I got the needed 50-0-50 AC for the rotator control. An old 12v car battery was tapped at 10v, and was used to supply DC for the beam indicator as a temporary fix.

We were not quite home and dry yet. The rotator did not work until finally I diagnosed a broken rotator cable. Once more up the 70 foot mast, I unplugged the cable and brought this end back down to the shack. Two wires were open circuit, and I could see where the cable had been pinched when the mast fell during the first attempt to raise it. I removed the plug at the rotator end and found that two wires were disconnected (this may have been the cause of the original transformer burning out).

Half an hour later, with the cable repaired and the plug completely remade, I climbed the tower yet again. Soon after, we were in business; rotator and indicator worked! I made one more climb to tighten the beam to the rotator clamp, with the beam and indicator aligned to the North. As far as I remember, that was the last time I climbed that tower.

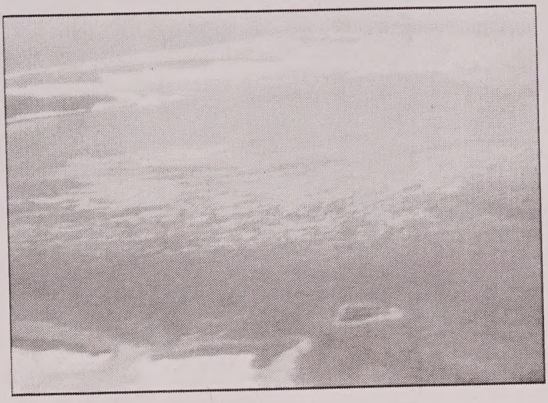
All that remains to be said is that a beam with a rotator and beam indicator is capable of magic, and with only a couple of days of our stay left it worked well. This made up for much of the hard work. I had simply lost track of the times I climbed both towers, lost track of how many times Bob and I stopped operating to do a bit more antenna work or yet more reorganisation. We now had a station with great all-band capability.

As is usual with DXpeditions to these areas, many JA stations were worked. They are without any doubt the most disciplined of the World's DX chasers. Ask a JA pile-up to stand by, it happens. Ask a JA pile-up to come in call areas, it happens. Pick up and acknowledge part of a call, most of the others will wait until the QSO is completed. Bob and I both worked many JA stations; in fact I made some 3,138 JA QSOs.

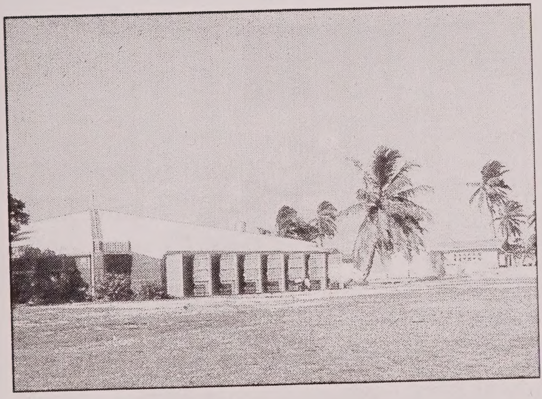
At last, with some 18,500 QSOs between us on 6 bands, CW, SSB and some RTTY, it was all over.

I packed my equipment and all the rest of the bits and pieces ready for the trip out in a few hours' time. As a last laugh, whilst tidying away odd tools and plugs, in a box belonging to John, I found a reel of 21 swg. enamelled wire, exactly right for that secondary winding of the controller transformer. Amazing co-incidence isn't it? Shortly after, I collapsed in bed trying to wind down and grab a couple of hours sleep.

Bob was on a tight schedule and I was highly tempted to stay another couple of weeks. Two weeks of uninterrupted operating and general tidying up, not to mention some sight-seeing of this wonderful area, would have worked wonders. However, my next stop was Christmas Island and perhaps Bob and I had done our share here on Cocos (Keeling). Let the other DXers who follow do some more work as the VK9YY station has a tremendous DX capability.



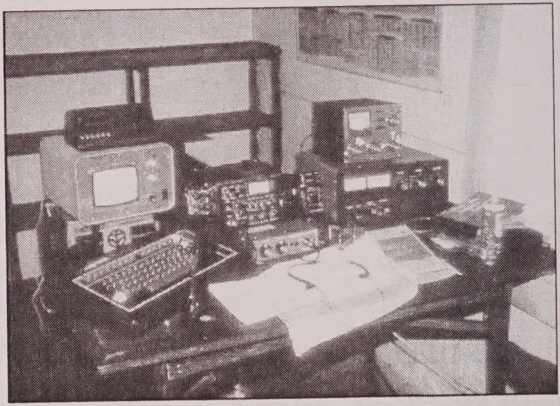
Aerial view of Cocos (Keeling) atoll.



Cocos (Keeling). West Island, cyclone proof shelter.

Cocos (Keeling) local Radio Station.

Easy transport, West Island, Cocos (Keeling).



VK9YS station with Tono RTTY, Cocos (Keeling).

Sunset time, Home Island, Cocos (Island).

Chapter 17

DXPEDITION TO CHRISTMAS ISLAND VK9XS

25 February-2 March 1987

The weekly flight from Perth catered for the needs of two Australian off-shore possessions, Cocas (Keeling) and Christmas Island. In a regular, convenient, shuttle service, it flew the route in sequence: Perth - Cocos (Keeling) - Christmas Island then returning to Perth. To show a complete lack of favouritism, the following week it flew Perth - Christmas Island - Cocos (Keeling) and then returned to Perth. As it happened, after our 2 week DXpedition, the plane's schedule was to fly from Cocos (Keeling) to Christmas Island and then to Perth. Knowing this I had made arrangements to visit Christmas Island for a week. Bob Winn was less fortunate as he had a commitment to return to the States immediately after his two weeks stay on Home Island.

After repeating our previous exercise (in reverse) we had all our baggage and equipment booked in, ready for our departure. The weekly charter flight duly landed and an hour later we said our goodbyes to John and family and boarded the plane. Soon after, we were on our way to our next stop, the enchantingly-named Christmas Island. The

Island was (re?) discovered in 1643 by Captain William Mynors of the *Royal Mary*. He was en route from the East Indies and heading back to England; he named it Christmas Island after the date of his Christmas day sighting. It should be noted that the island was originally discovered in 1666 and given the name Moni; however, no credit is given to the vessel and captain who actually sighted it.

The flight was an easy one and we landed an hour later at Christmas Island on schedule. Peter, VK9XP and his wife Rae, VK9NXL were there to meet the plane and after introducing them to Bob, we talked about the DXpedition. An hour later Bob said his goodbyes as he boarded the plane, and I waved to him as it took off for Perth. It had been a successful partnership for us both.

Soon after, with Peter's help, I had my entire normal luggage to hand and my radio equipment accounted for and we headed for the exit. I had made arrangements to stay with Peter and Rae as they were both old ex P.N.G. friends; there I had known them for over 5 years. Rae had been one of my success stories in Port Moresby as she had attended my Amateur Radio classes and had passed the novice license. Peter and Rae had been on Christmas Island for over a year.

Fortunately they had transport and we were soon on our way to their home. It did not take long to settle in; it was a roomy house and I had my own bedroom and facilities. We had plenty to talk about, as much had happened since we were last together in P.N.G. Peter was now a manager in charge of the local Broadcasting Station and also handled some other island communications facilities. They explained that the Island had a first class TV system and that island coverage was excellent.

Shortly after my arrival, Peter and I loaded all my equipment on to another vehicle as Rae wanted her car back! We headed for the proposed operating site a few miles away, which Peter had said, several weeks earlier, would be ideal. It had once been a large communication facility which had been recently de-commissioned. Inside the building it was a real mess; empty equipment racks, old cables and assorted other junk littered the floor.

It took some time, but a couple of hours later we had cleared the rubbish from area chosen for the station. We chose and cleaned up a suitable operating area and there, on a handy desk, we set up the VK9XS station. My trusty rig, the FL 2100Z amplifier and a Tono 9000E RTTY unit were all up and running.

Outside there was a huge bonus in the form of two radio masts ready for use. Those were both of a large, triangular, and broad based type of mast, very easy and safe to climb. Here we go again, I thought to myself, but there was not a great deal to do. Between us, we soon had a couple of antennas organised using the nearest tower, and my HF6V vertical was also in place. This was a very easy solution that enabled operating on multiple bands with only one antenna.

Over the coming week I was to spend as much time as possible operating as VK9XS. The station location was higher than the sea level VK9YS site of Home Island and the sea was some distance away. There was a big welcoming pile-up when I first opened up as my basic plans had been announced. The hours slipped along and that evening was very rough as I first noticed the appearance of unwelcome guests. The place was alive with rats; reasonable I suppose, since the site had been empty for some time. They are not my favourite company, and I decided there would be no sleep-over on site after a long session of operating. Forget it!

Over a year previously the building had ceased to accommodate humans on a 24 hour basis. Now the rats were a huge, unpleasant nuisance and, more importantly, they actually seemed to enjoy human company!! As a result, I was very careful with any food or snacks and kept everything wrapped up and took all my rubbish away with me after each operating session. (I was to remember these rats many years later when I went to Canton Island and how glad I was to get away from that dockside building site.)

Peter had also got himself organised, and he shared in the operating and in particular shared the RTTY operation. Rae was also to make QSOs, using her callsign VK9NXL; she refused point blank to operate in the evening. I arranged the design and printing of QSL cards for them both when I got back to Norfolk Island. I don't think that either of them had ever become active in a daily sense whilst they lived on Christmas Island.

The equipment worked without any problems and the number of radio contacts I made as VK9XS increased steadily. The band conditions which I had experienced on Home Island remained excellent and I enjoyed the relatively hassle-free operating sessions - on Home Island it had seemed that there was always yet another problem to tackle.

It was very nice being with Peter and Rae again. They are both very open and hospitable types, very easy going. I soon got into a routine of sleeping, eating, operating whenever possible and spending time with them both. We relived our memories of times together in P.N.G. In Port Moresby, Peter had not worked for the more usual CAA or Telecoms, but worked for a private communications company. This company dealt with a wide range of non-amateur transceivers and other communication products.

During my stay with them I was to meet dozens of their friends; they have an endless open house. They wanted to ensure that I saw something of the Island which at some 135 sq km is considerably larger than Norfolk Island.

The earliest recorded visit, and a landing made on this uninhabited island is in March of 1688 by William Dampier of the British ship *Cygnet*. The vessel was sailing en route to

Cocos (Keeling) but bad weather had intervened and eventually the vessel arrived off Christmas Island. Dampier landed at the Dales, on the West Coast, and two of his crewmen were the first recorded people to set foot on Christmas Island.

In coming years, once the Island's position had become well known and documented, several other vessels made the journey there. All found the Island difficult with no safe anchorage, and it swiftly gained a reputation for being almost impossible to land on. By the early 1870s the Captain of HMS *Amethyst* managed to get some crew members ashore. They reported finding the Island extremely rugged and hard going.

In 1887, Captain MacLear of HMS *Flying Fish*, having discovered an anchorage in a bay that he named Flying Fish Cove, landed a party and made a small but interesting collection of the flora and fauna. The following year, the Island took on quite a different face with the arrival of *HMS Egeria*. On board, a biologist (JF Lister) was one of the passengers; he was also interested in mineralogy. He duly made a small collection of mineral rocks during his visit. Later, on analysis of these samples, some proved to be pure phosphate. The British Crown immediately annexed the Island in June 1888.

As we know, the Clunies-Ross family had settled on Cocos (Keeling), and George, one of the two brothers, arrived from there and established a settlement in Flying Fish Cove. Christmas Island is almost 1000 km from the Cocos (Keeling) group, so they certainly got around in those far off days. Some years later, the mining of the phosphate began using workers from Singapore, China and Malaya as a cheap labour source. The Island (run by the British Phosphate Company) was administered from Singapore. In those days it was known as the Straits Colony.

It is a long and complicated history. In the last 20 years (as I write this) and since my VK9XS operation, Christmas Island has undergone many changes. It is well beyond the scope of this chapter, or even the whole book, to go into these changes and the present day situation.

The signs of the past activities of the Phosphate industry are everywhere. The company was Christmas Island in every sense as everything evolved around this industry. During my stay there, a walk around the town area very quickly showed signs of the influence of the phosphate workers, both past and present. One might well be walking around somewhere similar to Singapore in the late 40's; the shops are varied and based on the needs of a largely Asian population - both current and the descendants of the old tied labour force, brought to the island to work as indentured workers in the mining of the phosphate deposits. The European element is also there; shops and facilities suited to their needs abound.

In the past, as a result of a large ever-present expatriate population, Christmas Island was usually active on the Amateur Radio bands. The Island had an active radio club with the callsign of VK9XI. The various radio technicians working in the Broadcast, TV, and communications areas, often had radio amateurs among them. Peter showed me around the well-equipped workshop and the club premises of the VK9XI station. It had a large beam and several other antennas available. In those days, QSL cards were handled by a manager in Perth. In this way, confirmations of a QSO with VK9XI were readily available. I recall working the VK9XI station in the 60's very easily from England as G3HSR.

It is an amazing Island; one could readily understand just what the phosphate mining had meant in terms of environmental issues. It is a devastating industry and, many years later, British Phosphate was challenged in court over their activities on Christmas and other islands in the Indian Ocean and Pacific region.

Similar to Nauru, there is no safe harbour anchorage, and the phosphate was loaded on the ship standing off shore to avoid running aground. The huge gantry system is an amazing sight; its long arm unfolds reaching out to sea with its moving belt system. Once in place, the belt spews its endless stream of phosphate into the holds of the waiting ship. It was on this cheap fertilizer material that the farms of Australia and New Zealand were to thrive. It was this industry that, among many others, created and sustained the Clunies-Ross dynasty.

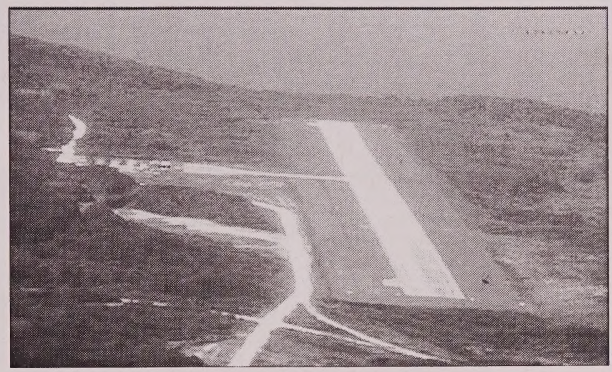
It is a wonderful Island, much of which is classified as a protected area these days. The famous red crab abounds by the hundreds of thousands. They are all over the island and readily seen whilst driving around. The endless squashed remains plastering the roads are everywhere. However, once each year they are driven by their urge to procreate, and, en mass, head for the sea. Peter explained the phenomenon to me; an unstoppable red carpet, a seething mass of red crabs moving relentlessly forward. On reaching the sea, the process of procreation takes place, and thus ensures the survival of this amazing creature. Years later, I was to see an excellent TV documentary on this subject.

The days quickly passed, as they always seem to do on these DXpedition style activities, and my week was soon over. I had to decline a generous offer to stay longer, although I was sorely tempted. As usual, the station was dismantled much quicker than it had taken to assemble, and it was all soon back at the house ready for the trip to the airport. I completed the packing of the station equipment and personal effects, ready for my departure next day. After a memorable last evening dinner-party (Rae was a fabulous cook), and a decent night's sleep, it would be time to leave for the airport.

My baggage was soon booked in with no hassle at all and I said my goodbyes and thanks to Rae and Peter. The plane duly arrived from Perth and after a short (one hour) turn around, it was time to leave. This time I would be landing on Cocos (Keeling) again on its return leg to Perth. Lifting up over the Island, I saw the island with different eyes, as I now recognised many of the areas visited during my stay. I had thoroughly enjoyed my visit and stay with old friends.

After the brief stop on Cocos (Keeling), the three hour flight to Perth was pleasant and finally I could relax. After a wonderful trip, I had a stop-over in Perth. It was there that John, VK6JJ and I met once again and I was able to say thanks for that linear amplifier swap. John had got his new amplifier up and running and it is true to say that we were both pleased with the transaction.

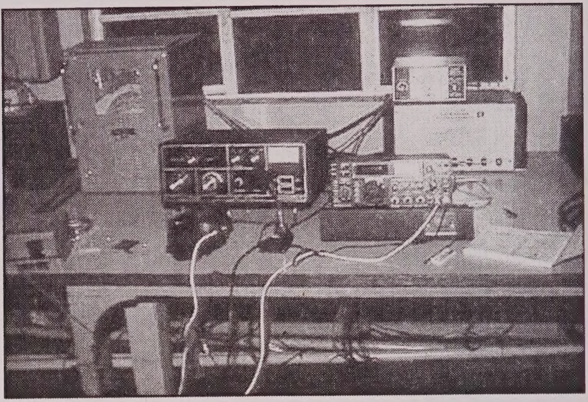
Next morning, I still had another 4,000 km plus to go on my long trip from Perth back to Norfolk Island.



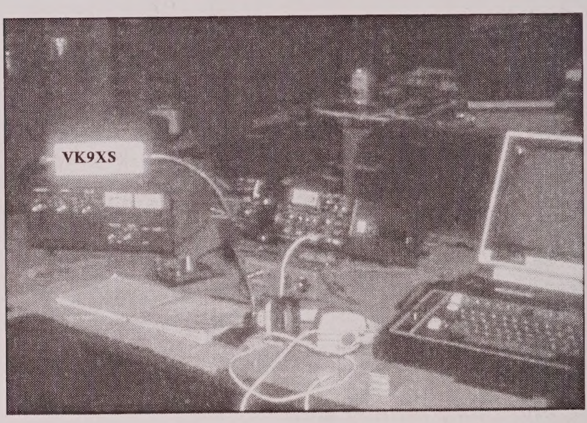
Arrival over-head Christmas Island runway.

Christmas Island, phosphate mining area.

Phosphate mining company expatriate housing area.



Christmas Island station used by Peter, VK9XP.



Christmas Island, station used by myself, VK9XS.

VK9XS position with RTTY capability.

Chapter 18

REPUBLIC OF KIRIBATI

Tarawa, T30JS and T30NL.

9 March – 27 March 1988 – Pre- KH1, Howland Island
7 April – 11 April 1988 – Post KH1, Howland

In the early part of 1988, the idea of a DXpedition to KH1, Howland Island, was finally coming into place and I made moves to make it all a reality.

The means of transport was to be a chartered vessel, the MV *Nei Momi*, based in Tarawa, Betio, in the Republic of Kiribati. Everything required for our journey and stay on Howland Island would need to be organised. All our material needs would have to be collected and then loaded aboard prior to our actual departure.

Tarawa is an atoll in the former British Colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, now known as the Republic of Kiribati. The current population of some 85,000 is Gilbertese, of Micronesian background. Tarawa has three administrative areas to govern the affairs of the atoll, as follows:

Temainano Urban Council (TUC) in Bairiki, southern Tarawa;
Betio Town Council (BTC) based on Betio Island;
Northern Tarawa Council which covers the

administration of the northern islands.

Tarawa has a claim to fame as a result of the Japanese occupation of the group in WW 2, based on Betio, a mere 3 square miles of sand and rock. The Japanese had built an airstrip, and a substantial force of some 4,000 troops manned the fortifications constructed to defend the area. The beaches and surrounding areas are littered with the remnants of pill boxes, gun posts and other wartime activities. In the centre of Tarawa the huge infrastructure of Rear Admiral Shibaski's command post is still standing, although derelict these days. The majority of these battle areas are now overgrown, as the local vegetation has taken control in the many years since the end of the Pacific war.

The task of dislodging this force was given to the US Marines of the 2nd Division. A landing was to be made from the sea but, before this actually took place, preparations had to be made. As a result Betio was pounded from US warships which lay well off shore and, in addition, a substantial air assault took place. It was felt after this 'softening up' that the Japanese resistance would be minimal and plans for the actual landing went ahead.

The landings were a disaster, made at dawn on a 'low tide' requiring a long slog by the marines being waist-deep in water to reach the beach. In the ensuing battle, casualties were extremely high and before Betio was taken many days later some 3,000 Marines had been killed. By the end of the invasion, only 17 Japanese defenders survived. The battle is remembered to this day as the story is handed down through the generations.

I had been licensed and had also operated from Tarawa before, because whilst I was based in Papua New Guinea I went there soon after the country attained its independence on the 1st of January 1979. I was issued the callsign of T3KJ – the callsign structure was later finalised as the T30, T31, T32 and T33 series of prefixes with a two letter suffix. For example I became T30JS, for Tarawa; T31JS, for Banaba; and

T33JS, for Canton Island. Tarawa was part of the British Gilbert Islands and on independence in 1979 became known as Western Kiribati with its new T30 prefix within the T3, ITU Block.

I also had access to T32JS and at one time I was thinking of going to Washington Island but, for various reasons, it never happened.

Long after these earlier days I had now finished my own arrangements to be in Tarawa for a couple of weeks prior to departure for Baker and Howland. As events transpired, I needed every day of this available time. Jean-Louis, TR8JLD, had also made arrangements, travelling from Gabon is West Africa (a long haul), to be there a few days before departure. Between us we achieved every goal and this is documented in the Howland Island chapter of this book.

Meanwhile, here on Tarawa, there would be a surge of T30 activity; several stations would be active prior to our departure for Howland. Amateur Radio licensing was straightforward. In my own case my call was T30JS and Kirsti (still on Norfolk Island) was allocated T30NL. Jean-Louis became licensed as T30JL, and on arrival the other operators duly received their individual licenses. We were all based in the Otintaai Hotel on Tarawa, which had a wonderful view overlooking the inner lagoon of the atoll.

The hotel management and staff were co-operative, and soon each member of the group who wanted to operate was set up and able to be active. Kirsti, in due course, would share the station with me. I operated as and when I had some free time, but it always seemed that some problem or another required attention; for example, Jean Louis and myself trying to organise this or that item still needed for the DXpedition. The logistical requirements for the Baker and Howland trip were considerable.

As a result of the visit of our group, there was certainly a burst of T30 activity. I know that JL enjoyed his spell of operating from the Pacific area. He was very experienced in handling pile-ups as he was active on a daily basis signing TR8JLD in Gabon, and he was a keen DXer. As a result of the number of stations active, there was often considerable local (and I mean local) QRM, but we all survived and made the best of things.

On our return from Howland Island, as events transpired, we were one day late. As a result, Kirsti, Jean-Louis and I missed the once a week Nauru flight. We therefore had an extra week of operating in Tarawa after all the others had gone! A couple of the other members of the group also had an extra day or two, depending on their flight schedules.

Both JL and I operated as much as possible in our free time. My own log book shows reasonable activity and QSO rate, and band conditions seem to have been excellent. We had also both got to know the local radio amateurs - Mote, T30MT, for example, who worked at Telecom licensing. He was invaluable with his local knowledge as we tried to overcome problem after problem caused as a result of delayed freight.

On return from Howland Island, HIDXA made a donation of a Kenwood TS 680 transceiver to Mote, T30MT. This was as a result of Kan, JA1BK donating the transceiver for use on Howland Island. Mote received his rig at a presentation at the hotel. He was happy and there is no doubt that he had been helpful in many areas. We had plagued him with our endless questions of where we could purchase this or that: who to telephone, where to go and which particular company was the best source for some needed item. Invariably Mote had an immediate response.

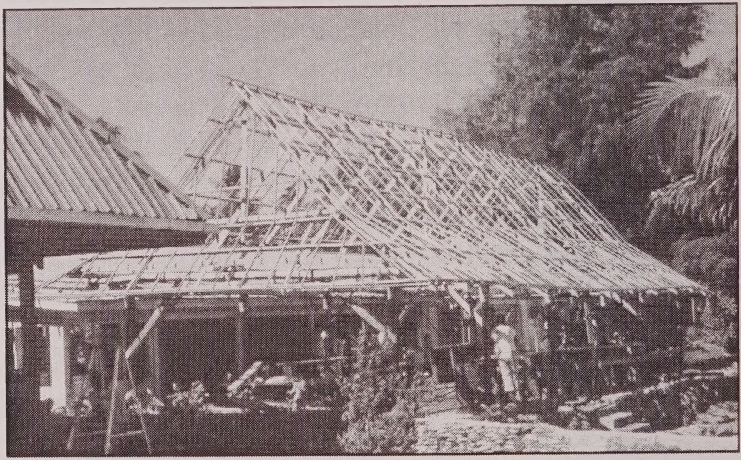
Kirsti had arrived on schedule, and she also taken her share of operating as T30NL. She had met Mote, JL and the other members of the group. The Howland Island team was almost complete and ready to go.

As the days passed we gathered together the required material for Howland Island and stored it on the wharf area of Betio. The shipping company had kindly supplied a ship's container for our use enabling us to lock everything up. The wharf area had at one time been separated from Tarawa by a stretch of tidal water. The inter-island connection, by ferry, was time wasting and frustrating. A grant from Japan enabled the islanders to build a 2km causeway, something which made the journey from town easy. The port located on the Betio side was now within easy access and this must have made a huge difference.

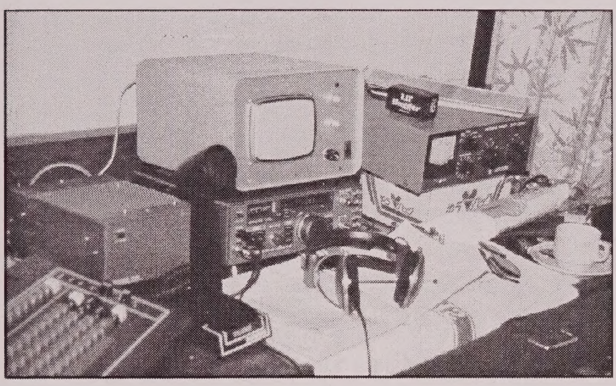
Any spare time was spent either looking around or trying to do some operating. Tarawa is a wonderful place with its blue lagoon and palm-fringed beaches. We found many things to see; a good local market, many shops and small villages were just a few of the attractions on offer. Also, the many war time relics which are easily reached, often on foot, sometimes a short taxi ride away. For instance, the remains of a landing craft, stuck on approaching the beach, frozen in time, is exposed and covered in an endless rhythm by the sea and its daily tidal flow, busy with its gradual process of rusting this and other relics into oblivion.

With everything now hopefully in place we were all ready to go and so we headed for the ship, ready for departure. It had been hard work getting everything organised for this DXpedition. We had spent some time loading all the material aboard the vessel, followed by the group and our personal belongings and now with everything in place, it was time to set sail for Howland Island, KH1, and discover what the island had in store for us all. It was an exciting moment and we were all raring to go.

HF6V Vertical used on Tarawa.



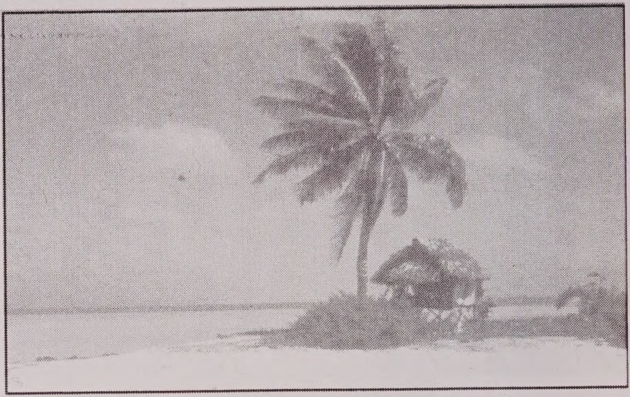
Building a new extension to the hotel, Tarawa.



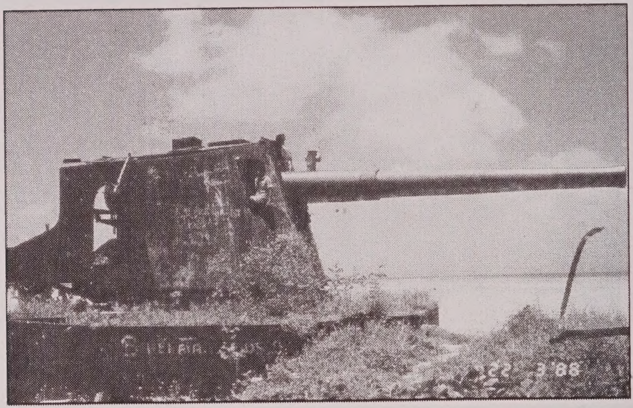
Station used by Kirsti, T30NL and Jim, T30JS.

Kirsti operating as T30NL in Tarawa.

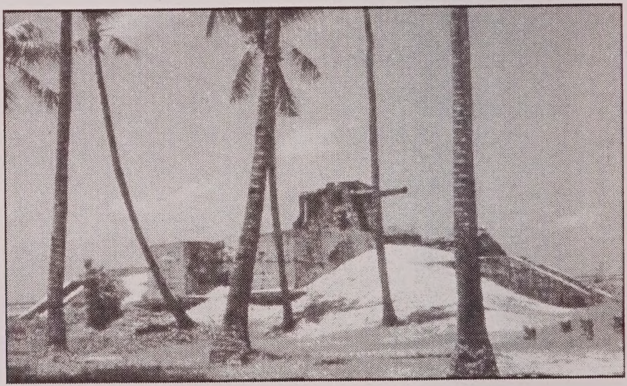
View of the back of the hotel, lagoon side, Tarawa.



Off shore islet Tarawa, Kiribati. (nice shack?)



Relic of the Pacific war, Japanese coastal gun.



Another Japanese coastal battery emplacement.

Chapter 19

DXPEDITION TO BAKER AND HOWLAND ISLANDS

NO1Z/KH1, March/April 1988

The Baker and Howland Island group lie approximately 1 degree north of the equator and approximately 179 degrees west. Both are uninhabited by humans. In earlier days phosphate mining was a huge industry as the many islands were stripped of their phosphate deposits. It was this factor that had the group added to the area of US colonisation in the 1930s.

To stake its claim to the Baker and Howland Group, the US government put 'settlers' (official title) ashore on Howland Island and then Baker Island in March and April of 1935. The vessel used for those pre WWII activities was the USCG Cutter *Itasca* (based in Hawaii) which on a more or less yearly basis kept the islands supplied. There, over the next few years, those settlers of the late 30's, built their own Itasca town consisting of a few buildings. It must have been a lonely life, compensated for perhaps by the beautiful beach on the lee side of the Island; fringing reefs, pure white sand, easy to catch fish, lobsters and of course, birds in their thousands.

Thousands of shells are there to be picked up on the beach after every tide, but that, too, would have become everyday after several months. The diaries of these settlers sound cheery and there is not one word of rivalry or backbiting between them. Their story is a credit to them all.

There are not many mementos to their occupation of the Island and it was a surprise to talk to one station in Hawaii who had been one of those settlers. He had many questions. Were we actually on Howland Island? Was the Beacon still there? Had we seen an old bulldozer which was left behind? Had we had any luck on the North Reef with the lobsters, they were there for the picking at night with a suitable light? I promised him a few photographs on my return to Norfolk.

The USA also decided to build an airfield on the Island as a possible re-fuelling point as flying into and across the Pacific area increased.

Howland Island later became associated with the famous aviatrix Amelia Earhart's (Lady Lindy) intended flight from Lae, New Guinea, on her round the world flight. This leg of some 2,556 miles from Lae, New Guinea, was the hardest leg of her round the world trip and stretched everything to the limit with no margins for error. The plane carried fuel for 20 hours of flight. Amelia reported the position of the plane as overhead of Howland (this tiny speck of land) but they never made it. It seems that Amelia's navigator Fred Noonan and she had perished. It is a mystery, and although there have been endless theories their exact fate remains unknown.

The small airfield was bombed by both Japanese and American planes in WWII, thus ensuring that neither country would be able to make use of it. The few buildings made by the settlers were also destroyed by Japanese bombs. The only signs of the settlement are the remains of the long, low stone walls built to mark the boundary of their small community, representing hours of hard labour. However, the focal point of the Island is the beacon, built as a memorial to Amelia.

WW2 had thus put an end to any idea of permanent settlement on Howland Island and it was abandoned. Howland Island had not been active in a radio amateur sense since 1948, but there are records of pre-war QSOs, and I have a couple of letters from people who were on this Island during this period.

This story starts at a time when I became interested in the possibility of a DXpedition to T31, Canton Island. It had not been active for some time and it became apparent that there it was possible to go there as the Kiribati Shipping Co. had a vessel running there on a regular basis. Amateur Radio licensing would be straightforward since I was already licensed with the T30JS callsign issued by the Kiribati authorities. This allowed me to apply for licensing in the T31, T32 and T33 callsign areas within the Kiribati region. As things progressed, however, I realised that it would need a six day sea voyage to get to T31, Canton Island lying almost 1,000 miles to the west from Tarawa.

To understand the situation in DXCC terms in those days, it should be remembered that being part of the Phoenix group, Canton Island had been jointly administered by both the British and USA governments. The Island had both a British and USA identity and, as a result, UK personnel interested in Amateur Radio used the VR1 prefix and USA personnel were issued callsigns using the KB6 prefix and later KH1. The two areas of the same island were separate DXCC countries.

After Kiribati Independence, the prefix T31 became the prefix for the whole Island. The /KH1 suffix was used for a short period on Canton Island, during the closing of USA involvement in the Island, and for a short period Canton Island still had a two DXCC country status. Six years had elapsed since Erik, SM0AGD, had signed portable /KH1 during his stay on Canton Island. On alternate days of operation Erik would use the portable /T31 (British

Canton) callsign or the /KH1 (US Canton callsign.

That convenient arrangement of having two DXCC countries from one small island had now ended. As a result, one could only work the KH1 DXCC area when there was radio activity from Baker or Howland Island. It was then that I realised that KH1, Baker and Howland Islands, was actually much nearer to Tarawa than Canton. In DXCC terms this group was also a much sought after DXCC country due to its long period of inactivity.

Since both of the islands were USA Territories, I approached the USA Department of the Interior in Hawaii. After several false starts I was finally informed that Baker and Howland were now under the control of the USA National Wildlife Refuge. In dealing with Doug Forsell of the USA National Fish and Wildlife Service, I discovered two interesting things. First, he had been to both Baker Island and Howland Island and also he was interested in my idea of visiting either island for Amateur Radio purposes.

He, of course, had a couple of points in mind. He was interested in USA involvement. The department was not too keen on a 'completely foreign' invasion of these USA islands. He was also worried about the impact on the bird population of noisy generators, antennas with masts and guy wires. In addition, there was the added perceived hazard of a bunch of crazy radio amateurs working on a 24-hour basis, screaming into microphones.

After some six weeks, several telephone calls, faxes and a few letters later, HIDXA and the USA Fish and Wildlife Service in Hawaii had a working arrangement - in fact a written contract. We, the radio amateurs, had agreement in principle for landing permission and they in turn had a method of getting to both islands at a reduced cost to their department. HIDXA would arrange a suitable charter vessel for the planned trip of around 15 days.

I then began to plan that HIDXA prepare for a 10-

member team to activate Howland Island. Seven of the group would be radio amateurs with at least a couple of USA participants. The other three would be two USA Fish and Wildlife personnel and one weatherman. The agreement was that each member would share the charter costs equally, and this would be some US $2,600 return, per person, ex Tarawa. As the groundwork continued, there was much to do in the area of the logistics of the operation. Once everything was in place in terms of licensing, transport and landing permission, the major DX outlets were informed of our intentions.

The islands are inhospitable in a human sense; there is no water, no shelter, and no electric power on either island. Therefore we had to provide everything needed for our stay. I used the magic of Fax for much of the planning, often Telex and telephone and, of course, endless letters. I noted in my mind how much easier this DXpedition was than our previous DXpedition to Heard Island. With the computer, I could now write one letter and run off several copies, all addressed to different people. It was easy to bring up any letter and write a few updates and, with Fax facilities, a great deal was achieved quickly. Such was progress in those days. However, just a few years later, with the arrival of email, the Fax machine was no longer used.

There was one prominent similarity to Heard Island in the area of Amateur Radio. In the early days we had dozens of operators who wanted to go to KH1 with us. A great and marvellous opportunity not to be missed for the world! But, as things moved along, several people fell by the wayside and in the end just five definite operators were available. For some reason the USA weatherman was withdrawn at the last moment. The major result of this of course, was that HIDXA now faced a larger and larger share of any financial commitment to the overall costs. At the last moment one more operator joined us when Mac, KV4AM, decided to come along. After travelling all the way to Tarawa however, Mac pulled out and remained in Tarawa signing T3OML. Mac would have been our oldest member and, on reflection, he had decided that the whole trip would be too much for him. In hindsight he had been correct, as our stay on Howland was certainly basic and invariably uncomfortable.

In an attempt to mitigate the costs, HIDXA made the decision to cut the charter from 15 days to 13 days, thus reducing costs by US $3,500 but still allowing for 7 days on the Island. As events proved, we had slightly less than 7 days ashore as a result of rough weather on the voyage out. It would have been good to have extended the charter by a couple of days, but in real terms it would have been prohibitively expensive to do so.

The Shipping Corporation of Kiribati has a huge responsibility serving all the island groups. The Republic of Kiribati is a vast area. This is quickly brought home when one realises, for example, the remoteness of Canton Island. The company has an excellent reputation and although charter costs were considerable, in return our group was given a large margin of personal safety. The vessel was capable of remaining in the vicinity of the Island and also the crew would be responsible for getting the party and equipment ashore. This in itself is a major problem as dealing with landing personnel and heavy equipment through roaring surf on remote Pacific islands is highly dangerous. The arrangement also relieved the party of a great deal of sheer physical effort.

I appreciated this benefit even more, later when we were finally ready to depart Howland Island. We were all exhausted as it had been a gruelling few days, and even lugging everything down to the beach would have been a major problem. With the help of the crew, however, it was a different story. We did what we could to help and they did all the heavy work.

The choice of Howland Island had been taken very early in our negotiations, following Doug's advice and his flat statement that "It is hard to get ashore on Baker Island." As far as I was concerned, that statement was good enough for me. Nevertheless, we did play with the idea of putting Baker Island on the air during the projected visit by Doug to the Island during our stay. We carried a spare generator as back up and fuel for its use. In the cold light of reality, it became apparent that much more was to be achieved if we all stuck together – this was a much safer and wiser option.

In addition to charter costs, each member had to find their way to Tarawa, some 700 miles from our destination, as this was our starting point. Gradually, the operator list filled up. We always started the list with Kirsti and me, and then just as quickly Jean-Louis, TR8JLD, decided to come. He travelled all the way from Gabon, West Africa; such is dedication. J-Louis was very quickly followed by Chris from Connecticut. A few weeks earlier he had just upgraded his license and his new callsign allocation was NO1Z. It was this callsign that we finally used for the Howland operation - NO1Z/KH1. Kirsti in turn signed VK9NL/KH1 as a separate callsign for a YL operator.

Ron, 7J3AAB, by this time was also in the running and in fact became part of the DXpedition. At the last minute, Jackie, F5CW, and now in Japan signing 7J1ADX had to withdraw as a result of work related (time off) problems. We were once again down to only having 5 operators, until the late appearance of Mac, KV4AM, mentioned earlier.

It was my opinion that we always needed at least one more operator and I still feel that the original idea of seven operators was about right. We had an enormous commitment in the shape of 6m and RTTY operation. In addition, genuine attempts were made to enable operation on the difficult 160m Amateur Radio band. In many respects it was a great pity that those one or two more operators, originally wanting to be part of the group, somehow did not join us in reality.

On arrival in Tarawa, a couple of weeks before departure, a tremendous amount of work had to be done. A great deal of equipment had arrived from Japan and the HIDXA consignment from Norfolk Island. The USA Fish and Wildlife staff had also freighted much of their basic needs. They had to be self-sufficient on Baker Island, and they came well prepared.

Customs, shipping, freight, generators and antenna supports, operating areas and shelter, were just some of the matters I needed to finalise. Of course, by this time much of the groundwork was already in place in a planning sense. Now this all had to be translated into reality. With the help of Ali, T30AY, within a couple of days, I knew my way around Tarawa and knew all the main business and other contact points. I had a meeting with the skipper of the *Nei Momi*; meetings with the chief customs officer and others followed.

In immediate terms, however, a major hiccup occurred. I had reserved, by Fax from Norfolk Island, 3 Yamaha 2.8 KVA Petrol Generators from a local down-town business. However, there had been a major power failure on one of the nearby islands and they were in urgent need of a generator. As a result, the company only had two generators left, and this was not enough for our needs. I had always planned for 3 stations plus RTTY and 6 m. The chances of getting a generator to Tarawa in time (except by using the expensive Air Freight option) were slim. Already a great deal of money was tied up in the supplies now in place.

Our salvation was a large diesel generator held for a local Catholic mission. They did not have enough money to pay for it, and I suggested a deal. Let HIDXA have the generator for 15 days (to cover the DXpedition period) and on return, HIDXA proposed to sell it to the mission as a 'used' item, with a $1,000 discount. This is the stuff of the bargain basement, but it was a reasonable approach for HIDXA as we now had the means to cover all our power requirements for $1,000 dollars whilst at the same time giving something back to the Tarawa community. The generator was purchased on the spot after one quick visit and a discussion at the Shipping Company! The question I put to them was simple, "Are you going to be able to get this monster on and then off Howland Island?" With barely a moment's pause the Skipper said, "Jim, I don't think you realise what we have to get ashore on our island runs, this one is easy!" (Hush my big mouth!)

Now our worries over power became a minor consideration, and we had no more problems at all with this aspect. I must admit they had a struggle, but with four brawny Kiribati males lifting, the generator did look light. Later, as they carried it up from the beach on Howland, they sang in a mumbling monologue. I am sure they sang: "These crazy radio amateurs, why can't they let us be, we would rather be fishing, singing and dancing." Another groan and another mumble: "Keep going, we are almost there, where does he want it? Wish he would make up his mind. Ah yes, this is better, we will soon be back to the fishing. They all seem to be pleased with this shiny monster!"

This generator was started shortly after arrival, was fuelled on the run (with care), and it was shut down a few minutes after our last QSO some 6 days later. It functioned in a perfect fashion and gave a solid performance throughout our stay.

With the problem of shelter we had a stroke of luck as in a Telex to Tarawa I enquired if the island had a local Boy Scout group. I thought it a possibility that they might have tents we could hire, thus saving the expense of buying them. A few days later, I had a telex reply stating that a large tent was available for hire at a reasonable rate.

By this time, Jean-Louis, TR8JLD, had joined me in

Tarawa and two heads are always better than one. Therefore we decided to check the tent and pitch it to see if it was complete and serviceable. Alas, we found that the tent had no guy ropes or pickets! A hurried shopping trip back into town to one of my previous wood working contacts, and I was able to have them make 20 strong wooden tent style pegs. Plastic covered rope was also purchased, guy ropes made, and we were in business. We repacked the tent and when we later unpacked we were safely lodged on Howland Island.

This tent was large enough to accommodate all our stations and the mountain of equipment and material we had carried from the beach. In addition, we had some spare space for a cot where one was able to grab a couple of hours sleep from time to time.

I had planned for two other areas of shelter using Doug's idea of framing and tarpaulins; we had the wooden frames built in Tarawa where we also purchased some tarpaulins. In a further area of shelter, we used the Amelia Earhart beacon as a tie point. This arrangement worked out well. Kirsti had brought along a tent for her own use but after a day or so it proved to be inadequate for the local windy conditions when it ripped in two.

For the main antennas, we had two Cushcraft 3 el beams, and to mount them so that they might be rotated I had designed a simple mast solution. This was basically 2 lengths of 2 inch galvanised water pipe which could be easily joined on site. The top length carried a rotatable guying point and the lower section had both a guying arrangement and the means of joining the two sections. I arranged for two 7-metre masts to be made using 2 inch water pipe. As a result of our experiences in Sarawak I had checked that this material was available on Tarawa.

The sections of 2 inch galvanised water pipe were now welded to my specifications. The rotatable joints were made and a suitable base was made from old car wheels and a simple bearing system. These rotatable masts worked well in practise; they helped me to confirm a theory I have always had. It is based on Murphy's Law, the one saying that when you need it most, a fixed beam is never pointing in the right direction. The well known 'Armstrong method' of physically hand turning the beam is fine within the framework of the usual DXpeditions restraints.

With suitable guy rope material the mast problems were now fixed. A local workshop undertook all the welding, but I felt that the charges were expensive. The people involved were not native Kiribati and that in part explained the situation.

Jean Louis and I had now managed to get all of the essential items in place. We had an arrangement with the Shipping Company whereby they lent us one of their 'Ship Containers' to store our bits and pieces. This also pleased Customs who were happy to release our freight into this secure bond area. It worked well in practise and provided good shelter for all our material as we collected it. Water containers, fuel drums, the tent, tables, chairs and radio equipment almost filled up the container. The addition of our new found diesel generator now made things look more businesslike.

We arranged fuel for the generators with the purchase of 400 litres of diesel and 200 litres of petrol for the one petrol generator we decided to carry as a backup, in case of a problem. We bought lubricating oil in smaller quantities of course and Kerosene for our cooking stoves and standby lamps. We had a promise that the fuel items would be delivered on the day of departure.

We were moving fast now with the arrival of Kirsti on schedule, followed by Chris and Mac. Ron arrived on the same flight as Doug and Dick of the USA Fish and Wildlife Service. Departure had been set for about 6pm on Thursday 24th March. This allowed all the latest arrivals one full day of shopping for anything needed at the last moment.

Doug and Dick purchased fresh fruit, bananas, limes, coconuts, papaya (paw-paw), imported apples and oranges. It was time to buy the soft drinks and a few cartons of beer, quantities all based on a ration of 2 or 3 each per day. The arrangement worked out fine. Even after our return to Tarawa, we still had a stock of beer, although this had been increased by a donation of two cartons of beer from the Captain of the *Nei Momi*, thanks to the wonderful catch of fish they now had on board.

On asking for a rough translation of the name *Nei Momi*, it was available immediately. Thinking that I had misunderstood, I asked, "What do you mean by Miss Marble?" With suitable gestures and description of playing that old school day game of marbles, I realised they had meant what they said. Miss Marble it was.

The vessel, built in Japan, was new and the passenger area which we occupied was excellent. Everything was clean, comfortable and all anyone would hope for, without the expense of an ocean liner. The crew cared for us and made us all feel at home. The food was simple, very tasty, well-cooked and served with the smile that is important to them. I must comment on these wonderful people of Kiribati with their continuing ability to smile and their cheerful outlook. It became a feature of all our dealings with them.

By 6pm we were all aboard, the fuel delivered as promised and already loaded. Our generator was now aboard and stowed, and the large aluminium dinghies were last to be loaded. Each of us now settled in to our small but comfortable cabins, and an hour or so later had a call for a meal. We all felt that, at last, we were on our way with the ship moving ahead bound for Howland Island

Some hours later, we were clear of the reef surrounding Tarawa and the sea was rough with a strong 25 knot headwind. In fact, this weather pattern followed us all the way to Howland Island, and it took over four days before we arrived off the Island at about 9pm. In the bright moonlight, we were now able to see the old Amelia Earhart Beacon with the long edge of surf-lined white beach dead ahead. It was an exciting moment.

We drifted off the Island all night until dawn, when we made a start to getting ashore. Our excitement was dampened slightly as the breaking water on the reef looked formidable. The crew soon loaded the first boat and it was on its way, heading for the shore. As a result of the rough water, they landed well down from the target point of the beach area opposite the Amelia Earhart beacon. This resulted in a long 'slog', bringing gear up to our intended operating area close to the Beacon.

The next boat was piloted much better and made it through the surf almost on target. We then followed with our gear and made it ashore without mishap; it was a happy moment. Fuel drums were floated ashore and were soon stacked up in a position near the generator.

Our main priority was pitching the large tent and the fuelling of the generator. The tent was pitched in windy conditions, but it went up okay with many willing helpers. With the wooden pickets and rope in place, the tent started to look a substantial shelter. That evening, a wild squall and heavy rain hit us hard. I think we were lucky in that the tent stayed up. Next morning we had a hurried re-assessment of the tent-guying. With a couple of hours of work, the tent guying was made more secure and we had no more trouble.

With the tent in place, some of the group worked to get a station organised and up and running and I ran one of our power cables to the generator. In the meantime, Jean-Louis and Ron were assembling one of the HF 6V Butternut verticals. They did this very quickly and soon had the antenna ready and the coax plugged into the rig. "All switches OFF!" I cried, and started the Diesel. It was a comfortable sound as we now had power available.

On switching on, the first rig sprang to life and NO1Z/KH1 was on the air. For our first radio contact from Howland Island we said hello on 14220 kHz to Tom, KH9AC, on Wake Island, the first station in our log. During the QSO we had a quick chat to acknowledge that we were all ashore and in excellent shape. We then moved to 14195 kHz, changed to split frequency operation, and we were now in business.

It was a great moment for us all. The planning, hard work and rough sea voyage were worth every minute. As the hours progressed, another antenna was installed and both beams were in place and connected. Shortly afterwards we brought another station into action. We were lucky with the propagation as the bands remained open hour after hour. There was always a huge pile up with more and more DXers requiring our attention.

Conditions on the Island, to say the least, were primitive. The Island was basically sand and coral but covered with more grass and vegetation than we had expected (the photographs I had seen always showed the island as a white, sandy, coral place.) All around were the birds, both in the air and on the ground. They had no difficulty in adjusting to our presence in their midst. Sightseeing was very easy and we all walked right around on the Island which is very small, a mere 1.6 sq kms.

The days of our stay on Howland Island merge into a blur. During the departure of the *Nei Momi* for Baker Island we were left alone, out in the wide blue yonder, and it was an experience. Our back-up rations became part of our existence. The water supply seemed more important now, as it was all we had. Small things took on a new look; we had only a finite quantity of fuel, limited food, and it all needed to be used with care. But no sooner had Doug and Dick said cheerio as they left with the *Nei Momi* for Baker Island than it seemed to me that they were walking back up the beach again. We were safe again with the vessel standing off the beach. Another major plus was that our daily dinner was back – a huge pot of fish and rice.

After six days of operating it was time to think about packing up. We had had our moments of great excitement as 6m finally opened up. Someone reported hearing our beacon VK9NL/KH1 running on 50.110 MHz, and Kirsti was able to work many stations during the opening. We had the excitement of one memorable sunset opening on 160m, when the strength of many of the incoming signals was unbelievable. Long after sunset proper, and many QSOs later, we were still being called, and still working stations.

Those first periods of RTTY operation gave DXers a Howland Island contact for the very first time in this mode. Working RTTY always resulted in another major pile-up. It was the same story for the period of our 166 hours of continuous operating. At times it often seemed that there was to be no end to the pile-ups.

It was exciting to see Kirsti giving all and sundry a new YL country. She was the only operator to use the VK9NL/KH1 callsign. All other operators used NO1Z/KH1 and with around 27,500 QSOs in the log, it was time to go. A final QSO with a JA station and we all used him to say our own personal farewell to these memorable six days.

There is a certain fun, challenge and a personal reward after these rare location DXpeditions which is hard to describe. All DXpeditioners seem to feel the same and in our group we all felt that we had done a good job.

On the credit side, we had no major equipment failures. This is often the curse of DXpeditions as the linear amplifier blows a 'string of diodes' after a power surge. A front-end receiver MOSFET gives up the ghost in response to an over-dose of RF as another operator opens up on the same band. The dozens of things that happen and do go wrong for some reason stayed away this time. No real

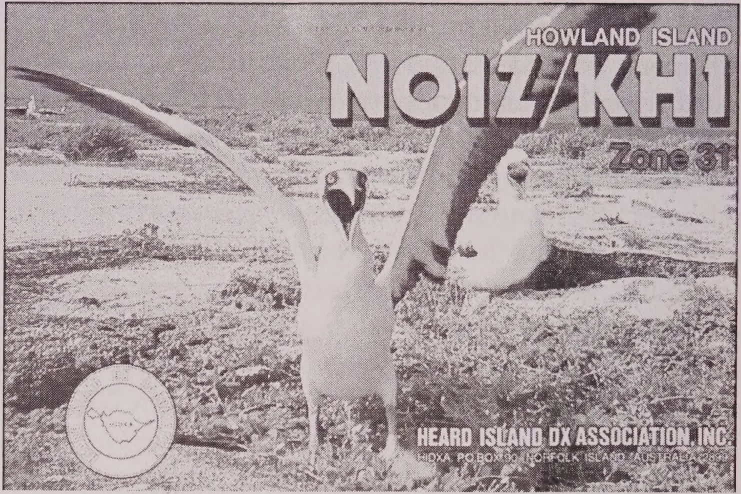
'Murphy' strikes, no big problems and in short, Lady Luck had smiled upon us.

The loading and return to the *Nei Momi* is a blurred image. We were all tired with always plenty to do. Nevertheless we dismantled all the DXpedition equipment; beams, verticals, tents, and other antennas; all came down much quicker than they had been put up. We cleared our site quickly with the help of the crew, removing all rubbish, leaving it all as we had found it and soon we were all safe and sound back on board. It had been a long wet morning which had many of our cardboard containers looking soggy.

This reminded me of the one major point which turned out to be incorrect. In discussion with Doug in those earlier days, he had said to me "It rarely rains on Howland Island!" We now know that this may have been true at one time, but with daily overcast skies and early morning showers followed by sunny days, the weather pattern appears to have changed.

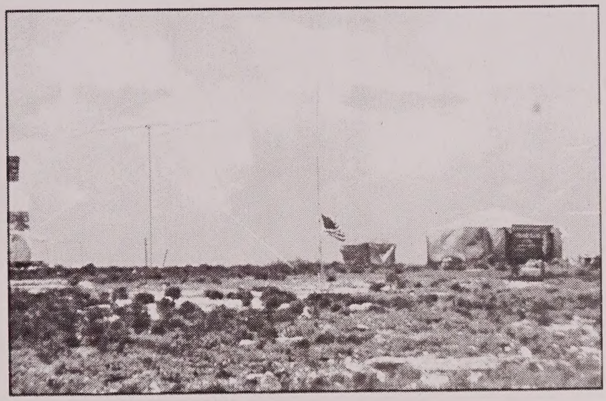
LOG TOTALS		NOIZ/KH1	VK9NL/KH1
160m	CW	190	
160m	SSB	1	
80m	CW	136	193
80m	SSB	407	
40m	CW	1741	436
40m	SSB	741	175
20m	CW	3365	370
20m	SSB	5681	427
15m	CW	3168	1353
15m	SSB	3689	155
10m	CW	1428	219
10m	SSB	3145	366
6m	CW/SSB	30	
		23692	3724

Total QSO total was around 27,416 and included the few QSOs made on 6m CW and SSB. Conditions on this band were not good. Then a couple of hundred QSOs were made on RTTY as another mode and should be added to the total and so complete the picture.

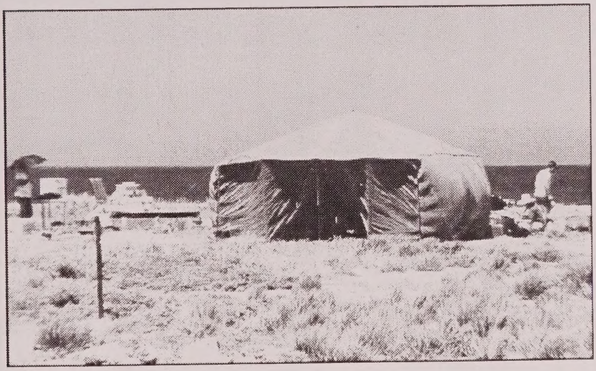

HOWLAND ISLAND
NO1Z/KH1
Zone 31
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION, INC.
HIDXA PO BOX 90 NORFOLK ISLAND AUSTRALIA 2899

The HIDXA, NO1Z/KH1, Howland Island QSL card.

Emilia Earhart Beacon, Howland Island.

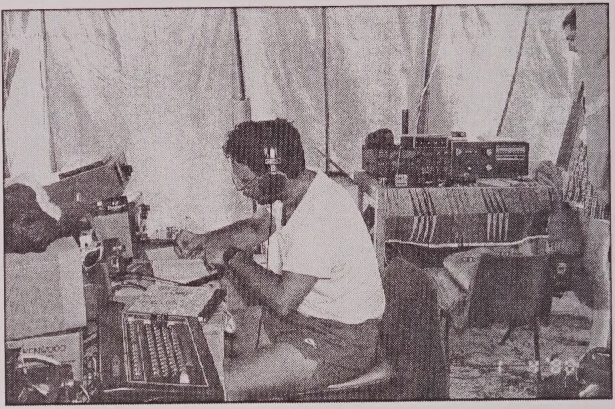


Operating and living area for the KH1 operation.

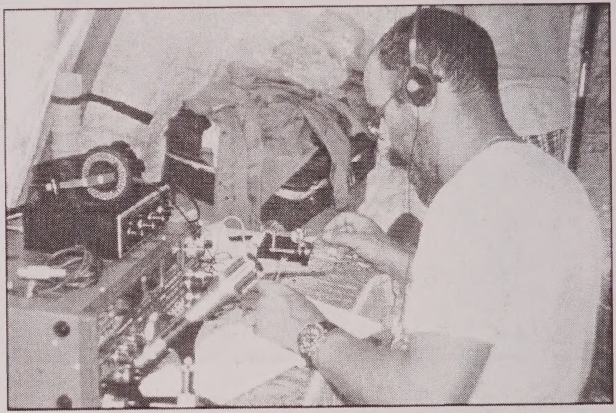


Close-up of shack and living area, NO1Z/KH1.

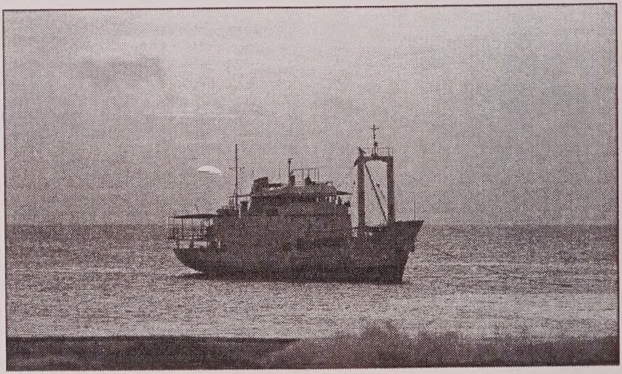
Kirsti helping with the raising of the first beam.



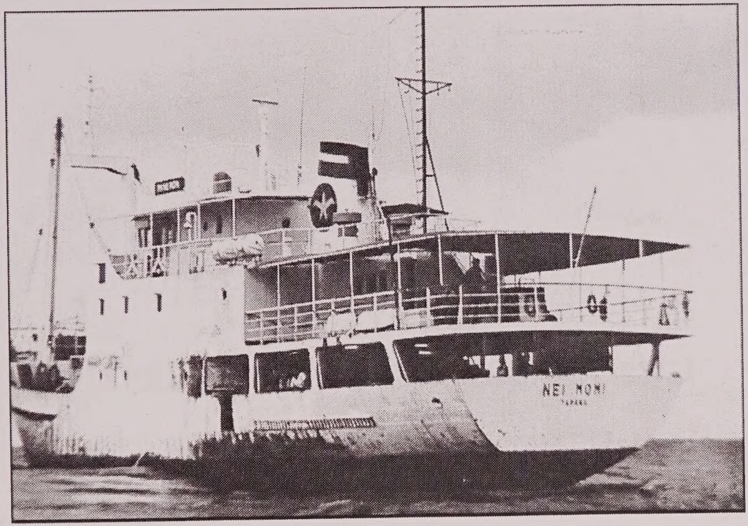
Chris, NO1Z operating SSB as NO1Z/KH1.



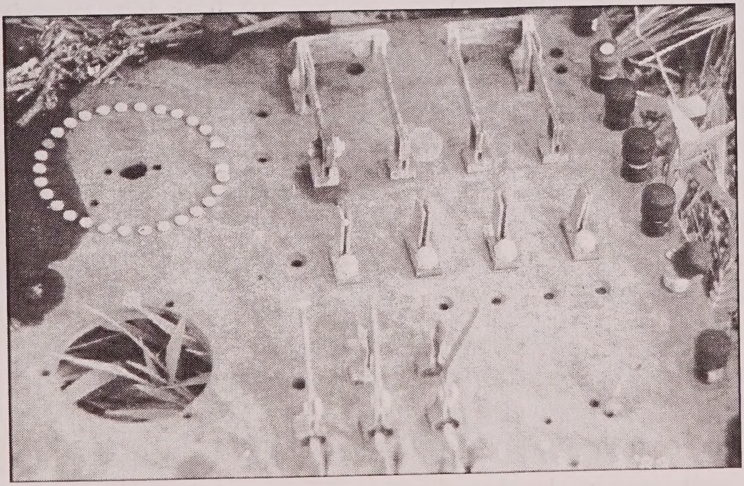
Jean Louis, TR8JLD operating CW as NO1Z/ KH1.



MV *Nei Momi* standing off Howland Island.



MV *Nei Momi* departs for Baker Island. (Hurry back!)



Old switch gear from the old Itasca town site.

Chapter 20

DXPEDITION TO CANTON ISLAND

T31JS 3 July - 19 July 1988

After returning from our DXpedition to Baker and Howland Island in early April 1998, I spent a week in Tarawa tidying up. Radio equipment, antennas and the dozens of other items we had used were sorted and repacked ready for shipping home. In many cases, we gave away items as small gifts, but in addition I put a number of things to one side for future use on T31, Canton Island. Operating tables, plastic containers, antenna supports, power wiring, coaxial cable, the HF Beam and gradually the various other items were coming together in one heap.

When I first thought about Canton Island, I realised that it was a four day voyage from Tarawa and, of course, the same distance on the return leg. These long sea voyages are counterproductive, eating into available time. It is much better to have eight days of operating on land, as at sea nothing would be achieved, so I considered the possibility of an air charter as a result of some discussion in Tarawa. Flying to Canton Island (about 1,000 miles to the East) from Tarawa would have taken only two or three hours. The additional expense would easily be offset by avoiding all the extra time required for sea travel. Other parties (outside of Amateur Radio) expressed an interest in sharing the costs of any charter.

All equipment earmarked for Canton Island was stored in a ship's container courtesy of the Shipping Corporation of Kiribati. After completing all this work, Kirsti and I arrived back home on Norfolk Island. Meanwhile the other operators had also gone their separate ways, heading back to their respective homes. The main task on our return was to get the Howland Island QSL situation under control. At the post office on Norfolk Island several 'bags' of mail awaited our return. Naturally, after having been away for several weeks, it was an expected home-coming. In addition, there were things requiring our urgent attention, outside the realms of ham radio, such as the house and garden.

A few weeks later, the house was back to in order, our daily routine back to normal and the garden and mail were under control. We also made inroads into dealing with the KH1 QSL card requests. Almost 9,000 direct QSL cards were already in the mail when I received a telex from the Shipping Corporation of Kiribati. The telex read in part: "…the *Nei Momi* is scheduled to depart in the near future for Canton Island … ASAP, please inform us of your requirements". They suggested that the vessel would be able to drop me off at Canton Island, en route to Washington Island, and then to collect me on their return trip to Tarawa.

I must say that those earlier efforts trying to organise an air charter to and from Canton Island were foundering. The difficulties became endless and insoluble. To give an idea of a few of the problems; Tarawa/Canton was an unscheduled air route; possible difficulties with the state of the runway on Canton; government permission; and the availability of fuel there.

This telex arrived out of the blue and well ahead of any possible intended shipping schedule to Canton, which we had discussed in Tarawa. Although it was good news, it was, to say the least, very inconvenient. It was hard to justify yet another period away from home in the name of DXing. But I started considering whether a trip to Canton Island was feasible within the short time available. There would be much to do and organise within two weeks. Much of our own personal effects and equipment were still in limbo, en route from Tarawa to Norfolk Island by sea. As a result, I was short of a number of items of equipment which had been packed on the assumption that they would not be needed for at least three or more months.

Gradually, as various matters progressed, I thought the idea through with more care and it seemed that by increasing the amount of baggage taken from Norfolk to Tarawa I could overcome many of the perceived problems.

The main problem was getting to Tarawa in time to be on the *Nei Momi* prior to her departure. Under normal circumstances, this trip is easy: Norfolk Island - Sydney – Nandi (Fiji) - Nauru and the next connecting flight to Tarawa. However, it happened that Air Nauru was on strike and so a different route was required. One possible route was via Sydney - Nandi - Funafuti and from there to Tarawa. The journey in itself was a mini DXpedition with the added headache of a lack of freight capability for the Funafuti - Tarawa leg. The company was using the older turbo-prop planes which did not have the large freight capability of the modern jet, although passenger numbers carried were smaller, limited to around 50.

With Air Nauru and its larger planes out of action, this smaller Fijian Airline was being pushed to the limit trying to fill the gap. It was almost impossible to get firm confirmation of bookings and excess baggage carrying capability and so much nail biting ensued. At last, after numerous direct telephone calls, I had a guaranteed place on this important sector. This was for the weekend flight prior to departure of the *Nei Momi* and, importantly, it was guaranteed that my excess baggage of over 100 kg would be handled okay. My years with Civil Aviation occasionally paid off!

I arrived in Fiji, ready for the Nandi - Tarawa leg of my journey. This flight would put me in Tarawa the following Sunday afternoon. This was 30 hours before the scheduled departure of the *Nei Momi* for Canton Island at 6pm on Monday. The arrival on Tarawa was on schedule and my excess baggage was cleared without difficulty through customs. Soon after, I was booked into the Otintaai hotel and welcomed with a smile. Shortly after, I recovered needed items from our Ship's Container in town. It all took hours, but I now had a generator, fuel and various containers to hand. As I collected food, water, shelter and bedding, the list of needed items became shorter and by 1pm on the Monday I was aboard the *Nei Momi* with all my gear, ready for departure. I was exhausted, and yet being back on the *Nei Momi* made me 'feel at ease' as I remembered the previous journey with the Howland Island gang.

An hour later I was told that departure was delayed 24 hours as a result of a generator fault on board! So it was back to the hotel with enough clothes to keep me going until next day. The following morning, for a few more hours, I was able to buy some extra food and other items. After lunch, I went back on board and set about reorganizing some of the radio equipment.

The *Nei Momi* departed an hour later than the re-scheduled time and the boat was to be my home for the next few days. I felt at ease but I also missed Kirsti, Jean-Louis, Ron, Chris and the others who had shared that other trip. The plus side to it all was that I actually knew most of the crew and my way around the ship. It was quite different to the last time when we had the boat to ourselves. This time the vessel carried over 100 deck passengers, men, women, kids, dogs, and all their eating and sleeping paraphernalia, crowded onto the available deck space. It was a busy area with continuous chatter and plenty of smiling faces. The use of fresh water was restricted to two sessions per day. Food was served daily on time and the days seemed to fly along filled with reading and talking.

The voyage was very pleasant and I used a couple of good vantage points to keep an eye on the sea and surrounds. There are many dolphins in this vast area and they are amazing creatures. They are skilled at surfing the bow wave and it is easy to see that they are having a great time. There was very little other sea traffic, although we did sight a couple of fishing vessels. This is a huge area of water, rich in tuna, a highly popular food in the Pacific and Japan. Huge sums of money are involved in this fishing area and business.

Four evenings later, after an uneventful voyage, the vessel arrived off Canton Island; the sun was setting and as a result, there was nothing to do other than to settle down for another night aboard. At dawn next morning I was up on deck. During the night we had drifted a considerable way and Canton Island was now some distance away. Shortly after breakfast, the *Nei Momi* was under power and now eating up the distance back towards the entrance to the Canton Island lagoon. This narrow channel is rough; water empties out of the lagoon at low tide and rushes in to fill up the lagoon again as the tide turns. The current runs very fast through this narrow entrance and it all looked very dangerous. Nestling near the entrance, on the starboard side, a rusting relic of a wrecked ship lay in silence. This was a gentle reminder of the dangers around the entrance to the lagoon.

After a spectacular and scary roller coaster ride through the entrance, the *Nei Momi* approached the calm of the wharf. A short time later, she was tied up alongside and…

What a welcome! ...the whole population of Canton had turned out to greet us - all 16 of them! They were all shouting and waving their arms and a start was quickly made to getting all the cargo ashore. As the heap of bags, boxes and freight were unloaded on shore, I gleaned a few facts. The Island had one bicycle, one motor vehicle and as mentioned, a population of 16, including children, in residence.

I had been issued a permit to stay on Canton for one month. This same permit allowed me to use any of the many empty buildings for my shack and living area. An old office style building was close to the wharf and this was to be my choice. It would cut down the distance over which all my gear had to be lugged to a mere 100 yards. In a short time, the ship's work was now finished and she was ready to depart. Many willing helpers had made things easy for me.

There had been one snag, in that they were unable to locate my Beam support (a fancy name for a 6 m length of galvanised water pipe). Although I had stowed it on deck, next to my fuel drums, for some reason, perhaps a safety one, it had been moved to the hold and lost. With considerable luck I found a longish length of similar pipe against an old fence near my 'office'. I recovered this and pressed it into service. In a short time, the beam was assembled and was soon up in the air with the coax feed line run to my 'shack'.

I started to unpack the Butternut HF6 V vertical ready for my usual assembly routine. It was last used on Howland Island and for a few minutes I had another minor panic as two sections were 'frozen together'. A quick spray with 'good old' WD40 did the trick and promptly the vertical was assembled and installed. The lagoon of Canton Island was a substantial ground plane, a matter of feet away from the base of the vertical.

In the meantime, my 200 litre fuel drums and generator were brought over by a few islanders in the truck and man-handled into place. The Canton truck had spent hours running between the dock and the *Nei Momi* and the village area some distance away.

Until the *Nei Momi* finally departed at around 5 pm, all of us had been kept busy. The cargo had been unloaded; rice, tinned goods, biscuits, other food and supplies for this tiny community. They, too, had a slight hiccup in that their flour supplies remained buried under a mountain of cargo destined for Washington Island. They would have to await the return of the ship from there in a couple of weeks' time.

By this time, I had met the carpenter, the policeman, the radio man and a couple of the families and their kids. They were intrigued that I intended to stay on Canton until being picked up by the *Nei Momi* on her return leg to Tarawa. At that time it was thought that she would be back in about 10 days, but as things turned out, it was to be 17 days later when she once again ran through the narrow channel entrance to pick up 'yours truly'.

Running up the generator for the first time and getting on the air as T3lJS was an exciting moment. After an hour or so I stopped operating to wave the *Nei Momi* a fond farewell before taking a couple of photos. I later used one for my T31JS QSL card! There was just an hour to go before darkness. I checked to see that I was organised for my first night ashore. I filled up the paraffin lamp (handy back-up lighting when that generator was switched off) and I made sure my torch was to hand. I organised my sleeping arrangements and then, with a sure feeling that things were going well, I began to feel hungry. I was not really in the mood for a three course meal - it had been hard day. But I soon had that old standby soup and plenty of bread - the ship's cook, as I left the ship, had given me a couple of newly-baked loaves.

The first couple of days passed quickly with always a big pile-up to work. My living conditions were not bad.

Although the office building was dirty (but being cleaned up) and a few rats scuttled around, I did have a strong roof over my head; lucky, as on the second night a storm front moved through. It was windy with heavy rain but I remained safe and dry. Over the next couple of days I found my bearings around the wharf area and I also had a regular visitor. Nick, the weather and radio man, had to visit the wharf every couple of days to read the tidal gauge.

We had met on my arrival and he was interested in my radio equipment. He was unhappy with my living conditions and suggested that I should stay in the 'settlement area' and join the islander group. "Much better than staying in this dirty old place!", he commented, but I was reluctant to intrude on their lives with a noisy generator, operating ham radio at all hours of the night. Nick also gave me the Island's one and only bicycle on loan. He just happened to have it on the back of the truck! It would be easy to look around, see the sights and the various areas of the island. "Come out and meet us all," he said, "Have a bath, get yourself cleaned up!" (Did I look that bad after only a couple of days?)

Nick was a clever person, and I played right into his and the community's hands. My eventual arrival at the settlement was greeted with a warm welcome. Intruding? They did not know the meaning of the word and were unable to understand why I would want to 'rough it' at the wharf.

After some discussion, using their logical way of thinking things through, they decided that next day the truck would come down to the wharf and I would be moved together with generator, equipment and beam to the settlement. My new abode was to be the luxury of the old school building; a wonderful clean and pleasant area. Around ten o'clock next morning, the truck arrived with three of the men aboard. I had moved everything outside and the move to the village was made so fast that it was hard to see what I had been fussing about.

A few hours later and generator, rig and vertical were re-installed at the new site. Later in the afternoon, one of the women helped me 'walk' the water pipe and beam up to its new position. In the meantime the fuel drums for the generator had been man-handled into position and I was soon back on the air. What a difference! My spotlessly clean surroundings cheered me up. I now had a decent sleeping area and, more important, a much cleaner approach to cooking and eating food. It had been a brilliant and generous idea and I am grateful to Nick and his friends for their interest and help. It would have been easier for them to have left me down at the wharf for the duration of my stay, with no thought. This is not their way and we became good friends during my stay.

The number of radio contacts was increasing but I had spells when band activity was low and so I used this 'spare' time to start becoming familiar with Canton Island. The trusty 'bike' when available was used to cycle here, there and everywhere. As I rode around, I was able to build up a picture of life and work on this island a few short years ago.

We must pause here a moment to fill in a couple of details. Canton Island for many years had been under the joint administration of the UK and the US. The atoll had a British side and also an American side. It was used extensively in the early days of Trans-Pacific flight.

Post war the US had built a substantial base there for use on various projects associated with tracking NASA rocket launches. The base area was splendid, with great accommodation, messing facilities, married housing area, recreational areas and buildings. Some buildings housed the necessary store facilities, water plants and electrical generator plants, power reticulation, sewage disposal, a motor pool, and a substantial runway; all in good condition, though the place was a gigantic ghost town.

Here and there the environment was busy reclaiming areas to its original state.

It was a strange feeling walking, and in some cases cycling, through and around some of the buildings. Almost every photograph which I took has no signs of life at all. In fact, with the exception of photos taken around the settlement and wharf, my photos show little human activity. There was just me and my camera, with the local base scenery providing endless photo opportunities. I had the one and only bike on the island. Over the period of my stay, in time, I was gradually able to cover all the areas of the camp.

I took many pictures as almost everything in sight was interesting and exciting. The motor store with hundreds of gaskets and engine parts, many still in original boxes; the old cafeteria was there, empty and silent; still with boxes of paper plates, paper cups and plastic forks and knives waiting in silence for diners who would never come. The old out-door cinema was still in place, and yet, even though the large screen had long since fallen down, one was able to imagine that once darkness had fallen there would be some movie or another showing.

In many ways it must have been boring and tedious to work on Canton, waiting for that next tracking exercise. Outside actual working time, which was demanding, one needed pastimes other than swaying palms to watch and azure seas to swim in. I know from personal experience of my own career in similar places.

The thing that came home to me was that it all seemed a huge waste of resources. The place must have been a hive of activity, waiting for the next rocket 'shot' to be tracked, ex California or wherever. The endless discussions and fixes over the masses of electronic and communications gear. It is obvious that without money, and lots of it, the place would never have run; not been a home for a great many people over its lifetime. It is only governments who are able to afford the logistical costs of shipping diesel oil (as an example) for the generators, giving the needed power to run water purification, electric cookers, sewage disposal units, lighting, and general domestic electricity. These are minimum comforts for the isolated worker or serviceman thousands of miles from home.

As a Scot, I was also interested in the other area of Canton. On the other end of the atoll, the old British base lay some 26 km away. If possible, I wanted to visit this area as I had radio contacts with the old VR1 area in days gone by. It was agreed that if the truck was free for a day, we would try to visit this end of the atoll. The journey was to be tied in with a fishing trip to catch some needed stocks of the local delicacy – the bone fish. It was easy to catch, easily dried (for storage) and, to the population, was nutritious and good eating.

We set out a couple of days late with the truck groaning under a mountain of bits and pieces aboard. Apart from people, it carried fishing nets, cooking pots, water, fuel and shelter. After a journey of about 12 kms, we pulled onto a trail leading to the lagoon side of Canton. Here, a vast beach of white sand greeted us and the islanders explained that the waters in this area had plenty of good fish. The site was almost opposite the settlement area, many kms away. I estimated that we were about half way around the perimeter of the atoll. After unloading and setting up the tarpaulins as shelter, the driver and I set out on the rest of the journey. We had agreed that four of us would go to the British end, but at the last moment, the 'lure' of a good day's fishing was too much. The driver and I were to be the only two of the group to go.

The roads around the US end were excellent, but, soon after leaving the airport area we were back on a very rough track with plenty of overhanging shrubs and bushes. As we progressed on that wide arc around the perimeter of the lagoon, travel got steadily harder until after a few kms, we were able to see some of the old buildings of the British settlement area. In the meantime, the road ahead had a large sand drift across it. Within minutes, we crawled to a halt and were stuck in the sand up to the back axle. In an instant I was back in time when, years before, digging my truck out of the sand had been a part of life in Saudi Arabia. We were on our own though and not equipped for this emergency. It was a hard slog to get ourselves free and any idea of trying to go forward was out of the question. I did not even have the energy to walk the remaining 4 or 5 km to visit the area. The journey back to the main group was uneventful broken by a stop at a spot which had been a recreational area of days gone by. A shady grove of coconut palms looked very inviting, and we were soon drinking a long, cool drink of refreshing coconut milk. The trees were now neglected with hundreds of old coconuts littering the ground. We threw a few on the truck for 'pig food' and all arrived safely back at our base camp.

The rest of the group had been busy; a large catch of fish had already been cleaned and prepared, ready to start the drying process. Around the site were dozens of hermit crabs scampering around for they are the ever busy scavengers of atolls. Our area was surrounded by them in a circle making their way towards our camp; they must have a tremendous sense of smell and in these circumstances, are guaranteed to appear.

The group had a long discussion about the trip and it was plain to see that they were not happy that that we did not make it. Anyway, we loaded up the truck and headed back to the settlement area. It had been a longish day and I was ready for something to eat. Perhaps, after a break, I would then get around to some serious operating for a while.

Later that evening, Nick arrived and expressed how sorry they all were that we had not reached the old British area of Canton. All being well, we would try again tomorrow, and this time there would be no fishing! Everyone would be there to help.

And so it was that early the next morning, after loading the truck, four of us set out again. This time we had other items aboard; a spade and some old rubber carpets in case we got stuck again. On this trip, we stopped at various areas on the way. First stop was a large bird nesting site on the lagoon side with dozens of birds, chicks and nests with eggs. The chicks are real comics when young, with a huge fluffy look about them. Later on, we stopped at another area where the Booby birds had their nesting grounds. They had different habits to those on Howland Island, as they were perched in the short stubby trees and bushes. They took off in their hundreds as we approached. I took a few more photographs, and once again, we were on our way.

Next stop was a large site on the other side of the atoll. This had at one time been a major US military site. It was said that from the bunker the explosion of atomic weapons had been watched in safety. In those days long ago, the US had at one time 25,000 troops stationed on Canton, staging here or there on their way to the various battle zones. Many remains of this old camp are still to be seen. Old culverts, concrete plinths, much weathered timber, bits of metal and many WWII beer and coke bottles littering the site. We looked around some of the old fortifications where the sole residents these days are birds and hermit crabs. In another area, thousands of empty cartridge cases littered the ground. This area had been a rifle or machine gun shooting range. Soon after, we were back in that old coconut grove again and another stop was made to gather some drinking coconuts. We also started to load the truck with stones and chunks of old coral. The load got larger and larger until my companions were satisfied; the truck was now better equipped to travel through the soft sand ahead. We continued on our way to our destination a few km away.

This time we sailed through that drifted sandy area. It was easy to see where we had spent much time and effort digging ourselves out. In a few minutes, we were driving through the heavy overgrown area that had once been the British tip of Canton Island.

The visual difference between the 'two ends' of the atoll was immediate and apparent; they were two different worlds. Lying across the neck of the lagoon, a matter of a few hundred metres away, was the jetty where the *Nei Momi* had arrived a few days before. On that far side was the remains of US technology in the shape of huge government spending whilst on this British side, based on what I had seen, were some old dilapidated buildings and a real step back in time. This area was much older, built long before the US post war activities on the other side of the atoll. The buildings had all been made of wood; much of it now in a badly weathered state. Many of the buildings, as their structures had weakened over the years, had collapsed under the weight of their old corrugated iron roofs.

Outside the 'Hotel' building, an old vehicle stood in silence quietly rusting away. The name of the hotel, now unreadable, had been written on the door. Was the vehicle waiting for the final hotel guests to be driven to the plane, to continue their journey to here, there, and everywhere? The hotel was a mess, and the roof had long since collapsed. It had at one time been a spacious building with large rooms, dining area and facilities. The large water tank was still intact, but full of a slimy algae. Yet, inside on the top surface, was plenty of clear, settled, rain water.

A walk over to the old Administration Centre was an amazing experience. The building still had its gracious character and exuded an air of importance. After all, it had been the centre of the British Empire on this remote atoll, part of the Phoenix Group. Either British Phoenix or American Phoenix and, perhaps at this moment, you realise why Canton Island had two different masters.

Only a select few, (probably now long dead), would know the decisions taken here in the name of King or Queen or country. The main floor of the building was an expensive hardwood affair. I was puzzled at first as it appeared to be in a very nice looking condition. Had some ghost heard that we would arrive and polished the floor, ready for our visit? The answer was much simpler. I realised that I was looking at the capabilities of years of driven sand across the flooring. The wind from the atoll side blows constantly through the wide open doors and open window frames. It had done the work of hundreds of sweepers and polishers and the resulting sheen was quite remarkable.

In a couple of hours we had visited all of the areas of the old camp and surrounds. I did have some idea of what to look for, as I had been researching an old map of the area. This map highlights the Administration Building, the Hotel, the Radio Hut, Musik Light, antenna towers and wharfs area. The main street was still discernible with much of the edge still marked with coral stones, no doubt painted white in those older colonial days. What tales this place would relate if given the chance to say a few words. It was exciting to see the sheer extent of it all; some areas were difficult to get to, as a result of being overgrown with shrubs and undergrowth. I had a strong feeling of wanting to return to find out more about this ever changing small community over the years. It may happen as it was a strange and moving experience to be visiting this tiny speck of the olden days of the British Empire. It all had a deep effect on me which evoked a powerful sense of nostalgia which took some time to ease.

Soon it was time to go. We were to find that the journey back was to be another of those marathons which taxed us all to the limit. We were soon passing through that drifted sand covered road area and on our way to the settlement some 25 km away. The road was rough until we pulled into the coconut grove once again, unloaded the coral material and replaced it with more of that wonderful coconut 'pig food'. We were soon on our way, but a few minutes later, we realised that we had a flat tyre. 'Yah Mama' or similar expressions crossed my mind.

The fixing of the flat tyre turned out to be straightforward. The men were experienced, having had many flat tyres before, and it showed. Out came the jack, the spare wheel was removed from its resting place under the truck and all was made ready to replace the wheel. The truck was moved to get the jack onto a better surface and after lifting the vehicle the rear wheel was removed. The spare wheel was soon in place, and, after settling the truck back down, the tools and jack were tidied up. Soon, we were ready, and the remaining journey back to the settlement was completed in a trouble-free 30 minutes.

At some point during the remaining days, the radio man received a message with notification that the *Nei Momi* was leaving Washington Island and gave an ETA for Canton Island.

With this in mind, I now kept to a relentless timetable of activity, and despite poor band conditions the QSO total was building up. I was also available on RTTY using the Tono 9000E with the mandatory home brew Green Screen monitor.

I was eating well, as I have always liked rice and fish of all kinds. I also had my diminishing small stock of goodies left; the luxury of a nice tin of vegetable soup comes to mind. The people had looked after me, sharing their food, checking from time to time that I was okay or if I needed anything.

My time for the scheduled departure was rushing towards me. I had decided that everything would be down to the quay in plenty of time - no last minute dashing around. I began to make inroads into what needed my attention now, sorting and getting ready for the trip back, packing unwanted items.

In one of those tidy up sessions, during a 'dead band' period, I was informed that tomorrow, my last full day on Canton, the islanders had decided to hold a celebration for me! Were they secretly going to be glad to get rid of me? Celebration was a strange word to use. I need not have worried, as during the early evening, the women started to set out all the food! I may say from experience that the Pacific Islanders have great appetites - they love their food.

The small feast that appeared in front of us was magnificent, and I remember that evening even now. I had managed to keep a few beers, one for each of the men and for the women and kids, a few goodies from my meagre rations - chocolate, biscuits, a few soft drinks to share between themselves. The remainder of my tinned items was to go into their food stock. My food stock had been depleted as a result of those extra days on the Island, but there was still some left.

Next morning, in plenty of time, all my goods and chattels were soon on board the truck. I left the remainder of my fuel to be used in the island truck. Maybe it would be used to fuel a couple of extra fishing trips up Island.

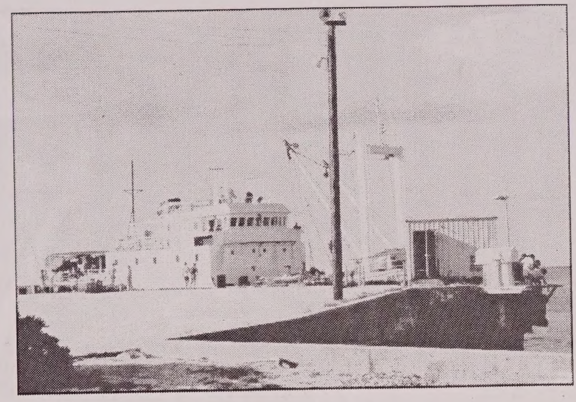
Everything was unloaded near the edge of the wharf and the truck headed back to the settlement area to up-lift everyone. They wanted that lost cargo, as rice was getting short. Also it was another chance to see a ship, talk to whomever they knew, and maybe catch up on some scandal from Washington Island. My eyes were drawn to that other side, the old British side; I saw the building outlines more clearly now and understood more about them. Had I been over there, walked in this or that building? The thoughts flashed through my mind.

The *Nei Momi* rushed into the lagoon again through that dangerous opening area before nudging gently against the wharf. My gear was quickly loaded and safely stowed. I had said my farewell to this wonderful group of people. Were the kids sad to see me go? It seemed that way. They had all treated me well and with affection. My guess is that in secret they must have thought I was mad! A few hours later, I was back on board, ready for departure.

The long four day voyage back to Tarawa was, as I recall now, uneventful. I was exhausted and caught up on my sleep. It was nice to meet the crew again and, as usual, they looked after me. "How had my trip gone?"; "What did I think of Canton?"; "How was the fishing, we hear it is very good?" I took the opportunity to unwind, taking things very easy. In many ways I had not stopped for breath whilst on Canton Island.

The return trip back to Norfolk Island was straightforward. It was nice to be home and be with Kirsti who was quick to point out that there was plenty of mail awaiting my attention!

Another DXpedition had been accomplished, with no major problems, and, it was fair to say that things had gone well. Now, on a complete switch off mode, I realised that I was exhausted.

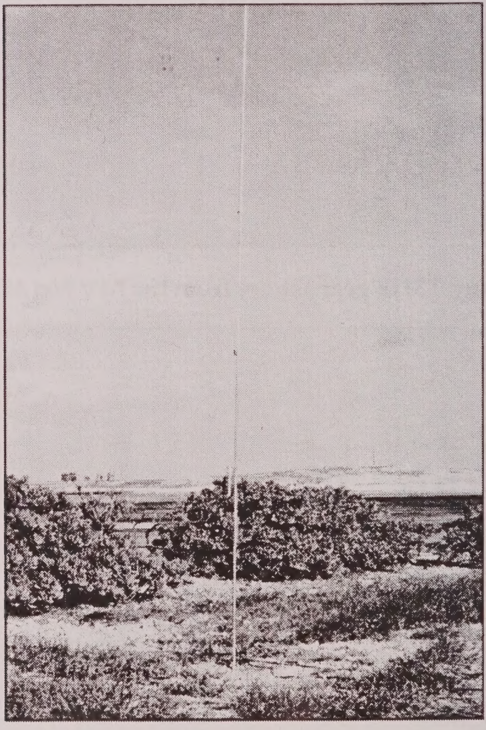


MV *Nei Momi* lying at the wharf, Canton Island.

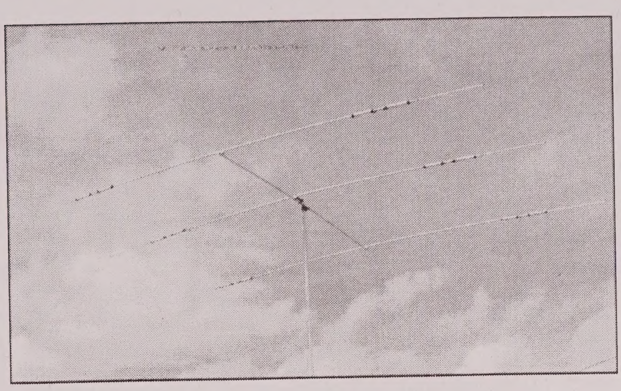
All my T31JS gear ashore from the MV *Nei Momi*.

Original site for the T31JS station, Canton Island.

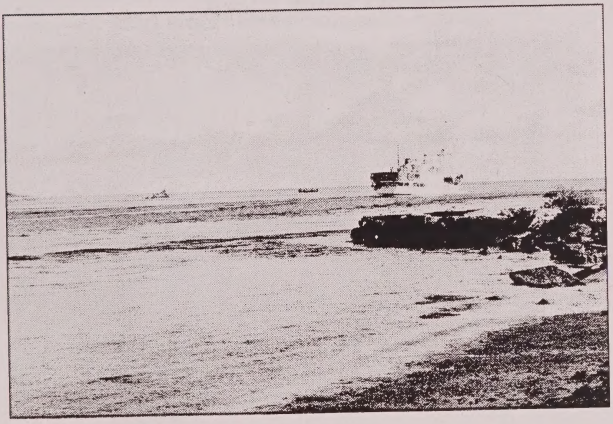
Generator and fuel for my T31JS operation.



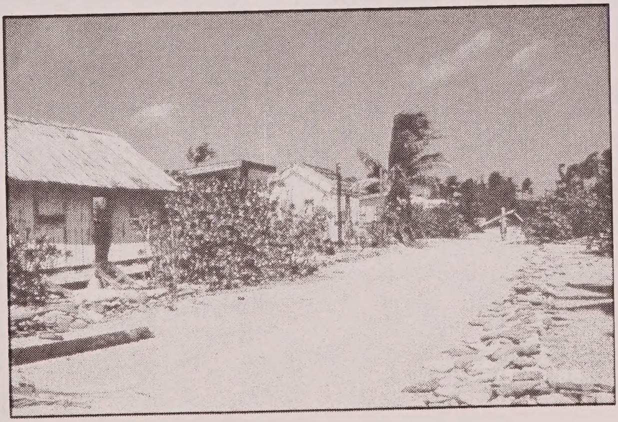
HF6V Vertical, wharf site, Canton Island.



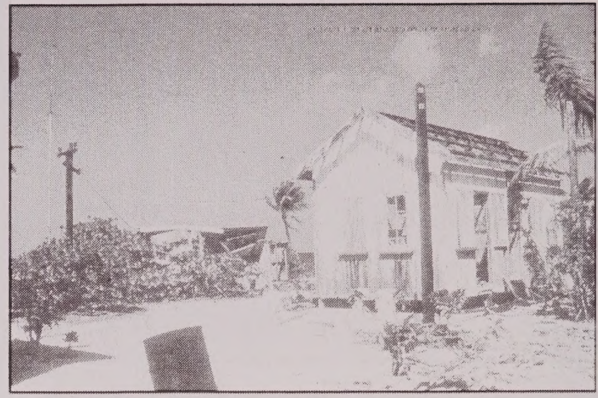
TA33 beam installed at the wharf site, Canton Is.



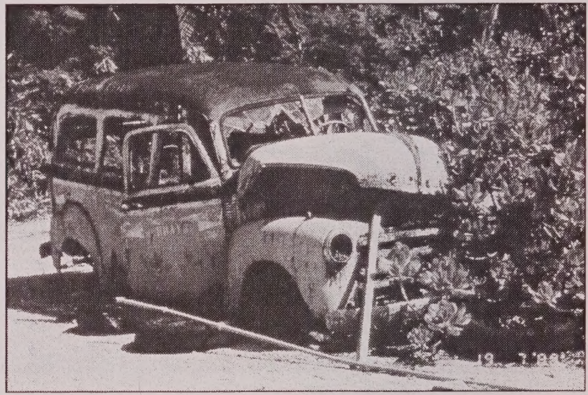
MV *Nei Momi* departs for Washington Island.



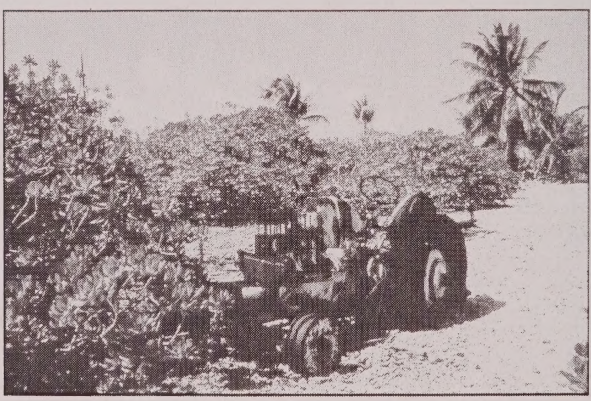
Main Street, old British side of Canton Island.



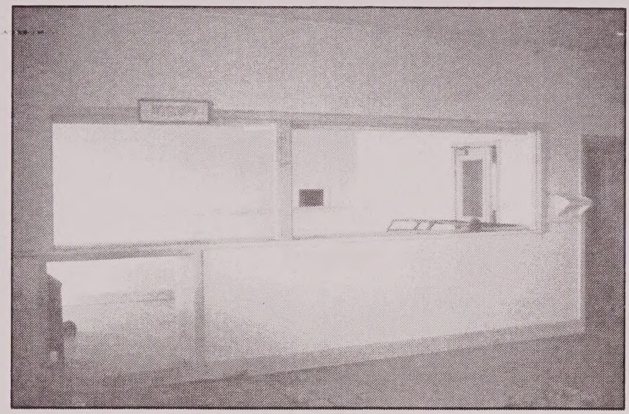
The Radio station, old British side of Canton Island.



Abandoned 'hotel' car on old British Canton Island.

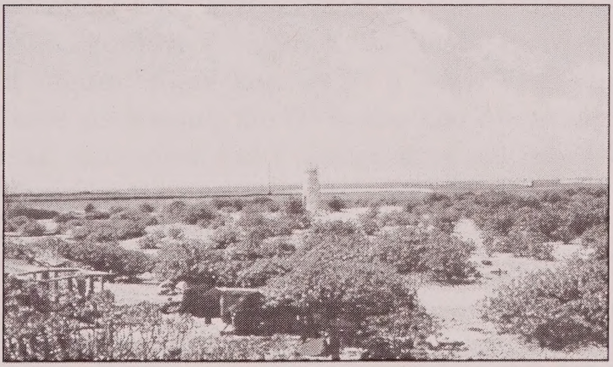


A tractor lies abandoned on British side of Canton Island.



Old Hotel reception area. British side of Canton Is.

View of US Canton Island from the Musik Light area.



Musik Light, British side of Canton Island.

Chapter 21

DXPEDITION TO BANABA (OCEAN) ISLAND

T33JS, MAY 1989

There is no doubt that the changes made to the 'DXCC Country Criteria' have breathed new life into the ARRL DXCC programme. It has long been an established fact that many of the DXCC countries are just not available on a day to day basis. Unless one had been active over many years it was easy to get 'stuck' at around the 300 country mark. A new DXCC ruling, which covered distance from a parent country, meant that several islands could count as new entities.

Many of us who are interested in DXpeditions to the rarer DXCC countries began to look at our atlases with renewed vigour; there had to be a 'New One' out there somewhere! As a result the DXer has had to chase Rotuma, Marquesas, Australes and Conway Reef as under the new ruling they had now become additions to the DXCC country list.

In my own case, I started looking at that large area of the Pacific known as the Republic of Kiribati. I had been thinking in terms of Malden, Starbuck and Vostok Islands in the area of the Southern Line Group, when I suddenly realised that Banaba Island (better known in the past as Ocean Island) was much easier to get to - and it appeared to qualify as a 'New One'!

The result was that some time later I had permission, a license and the means of getting to Banaba Island. However, I did not have the means of getting back to Tarawa and this was solved by arranging a 'charter of a vessel' to come and get me after a stay of two weeks.

Banaba Island means 'Stony Island' and Banaba legend says that the island came from the depths of the ocean and turned upside down. The Banabans say that in their eyes, the island has the appearance on an overturned canoe. Those who are familiar with how raw phosphate is formed will realise that this mythology is not too far from the truth. What was originally an island, for centuries a refuge for millions of sea birds, sank beneath the sea. The chemical reaction between water and thousands of tons of bird droppings changed these into raw phosphate. Years later the island once again rose from the sea and awaited the exploitation of its phosphate deposits.

The logistics for the DXpedition were formidable. There is no power, no water and no downtown store to shop for food. In fact everything needed for the stay had to be organised and transported to the island. Gradually I made arrangements for a generator, fuel and water to be available.

A dispute had been settled between the Phosphate Company and the Kiribati government which resolved two matters; one was the disposal of the huge mountain of phosphate stock on Banana and the large amount of fresh water in storage tanks, both originally owned by the company. This was a lucky reprieve from the requirement to carry sufficient fresh water for the stay. The vessel would carry two water engineers and during their stay they would reconnect the two huge water tanks, installed during the mining days, to the existing Banana facilities thus making the water available. This would be a huge asset for the island.

I intended to arrive in Tarawa three days before the scheduled departure of the vessel *Nei Mataburo* for Banaba Island and I planned to use this extra time to buy food and some other essentials. Subsequent events were to provide a different scenario.

About three weeks before departure, I received a telephone call from Bob, KN6J, asking if he could join me. After some discussion, we agreed that if everything could be arranged for permission, accommodation and licensing. Another operator would be of considerable benefit to the DXpedition. We further agreed that T33JS would be used for all CW and SSB contacts (to avoid duplication of radio contacts) and that Bob would sign T33RA using RTTY. Three weeks before my intended departure from Norfolk Island, I shipped (by air) some 150 kg of equipment ahead of me. This included a 3 el Cushcraft A4 Beam, coax cable, rotator, 6 m rig and linear, RTTY gear and monitor, log books, antenna tuner, power cables, power distribution boxes, keyer and many other bits and pieces. Later, I left Norfolk with some 80 kg of baggage which included my trusty ICOM 740 rig, Butternut HF6V vertical, coax cable, 5 el 6m beam, key and microphone.

On arrival at Nandi (Fiji), I had two clear days before catching the flight to Tarawa via Funafuti (Tuvalu) This flight is notorious for difficulties with freight and excess baggage, not to mention getting confirmed bookings. Next morning I checked at the airport freight shed and sure enough all my 150 kg of freight was still there. That day I did everything possible to ensure that the freight would travel with my flight on the Saturday morning. Otherwise I was faced with the possibility of a DXpedition with little or no ham equipment!

I arrived at Tarawa on the Saturday afternoon and my worst fears were now confirmed; none of my 150 kg of freight had been shipped. Worse still, a further 17 pieces of passenger baggage had been off-loaded at Funafuti. One of those items happened to be my ICOM 740 and a disaster stared me in the face.

Bob, KN6J, had arrived at Tarawa a couple of days earlier, and was there at the airport to meet me; he also had not received all of his baggage. He did have his TS 940S and a linear amplifier, but his Butternut vertical (with 160m adaptor) and several other important items were missing. It seemed that we were in a difficult position and Murphy had not yet finished with either of us!

On arrival at the hotel, by this time mid Saturday afternoon, I rang the shipping manager to check that the Monday morning departure was still okay. I was relieved to hear that the boat would be delayed until Tuesday morning. This extra time was welcome, as there much to do before departure for Banaba.

Bob and I then discussed the difficult situation. Let's call the whole thing off? What exactly did we have in the way of equipment and did we have a viable DXpedition? Well, we had one rig, one linear, one Butternut vertical (no 160m adaptor) plus a couple of lengths of coax. Bob had his RTTY equipment, but there would be no 160m activity. So the discussion went on and it began to look as though something could be done to retrieve the situation, in short, we would go, and keep our fingers crossed.

We spent the rest of the afternoon and most of the next day buying food and arranging that the generator would be delivered to the ship first thing Tuesday morning. I purchased all the necessary electrical items missing in my freight; extension cords, lighting fixtures and a couple of plugs. There was to be much duplication of items and, as a result, added expense. Replacements had to be found for the logbooks to be used, pens and dozens of other items still in Nandi. A gas cooker, cooking utensils and eating utensils were added to our heap of gear and the picture gradually became more cheerful.

It was around this time, on arrival back at the hotel late on Sunday afternoon, that Murphy picked up the telephone and called me. The shipping company manager was sorry, but the *Nei Mataburo* would not be available for another 7 or 8 days. Before I could 'hit the roof' it was hurriedly explained that it was beyond their control as the government of Kiribati had requisitioned the ship to go to Nauru. The governments of Kiribati and Nauru had just settled a dispute which had left 60 school children stranded on Nauru. They had been there for almost 5 months.

The initial reaction from us both was one of considerable disappointment. It meant at least a week of additional expense and in fact we both had to make arrangements for more funds to be sent. To look on the brighter side of things, it did mean that we were 'in with a chance' of getting our long overdue baggage before our departure.

With the delayed departure, we were also able to arrange other stop gap measures in case our freight did not arrive. Willy, T30AC, agreed to lend us his Cushcraft A4 beam, rotator and cable. (For good measure, we also borrowed his water pipe mast and guy wires!) Mote, T30MT, agreed to lend us his TS 680 transceiver (this had been donated by HIDXA after our KH1, Howland Island DXpedition) and in doing so, gave us back our capability of operating on 6m. Retite, T30BY, agreed to lend us his antenna tuner unit which was an important addition when using the TS 680 barefoot. This transceiver quickly shuts down even under a low SWR condition.

As it happened, the Tuesday flight from Nandi brought my ICOM 740 and most of the other passenger baggage. The Saturday flight brought most of my overdue freight, which had now been over 4 weeks en route. However, Murphy had two final things to say. They had off-loaded my beam at Funafuti, and Bob never received the balance of his gear.

At last, Bob and I were on our way as the *Nei Mataburo* left Tarawa en route or Banaba Island. It had been a long and very frustrating wait but it had been brightened by the help and generous assistance of the T30 amateurs. We also departed knowing that we had almost everything originally scheduled for the DXpedition and that we were at last in business.

The *Nei Mataburo* arrived off Banaba Island on Thursday morning after an uneventful trip from Tarawa. The weather had been very good. Bob and I were poised, ready to go ashore, but this was to take some time. The boat had to 'stand off' the island, tied to a deep water buoy. There are no harbour facilities for anything other than small boats available. All our gear had to be taken ashore in aluminium dinghies. Finally Bob and I were ashore and gradually our equipment was heaped up on the quay. We were surrounded by the population of the island; men, women and children laughed, staring at us and our pile of boxes and baggage. Who on earth were we and, more importantly, what were we going to do here?

The truck, nicknamed the 'Banaba Taxi', belonging to the Catholic Mission was being kept very busy. A couple of hours later, our turn came and shortly after, all our equipment and gear was loaded on board and we were on our way, climbing the steep road from the harbour area. The truck pulled into the front of Banaba House which was to be our home and shack for the next 14 days. It was perfect, filling our every need, providing us with a spacious operating area with a large table and comfortable chairs. In addition, each of us had a room for sleeping with bed, bedding and bed linen. It exceeded our wildest speculation on where, and how, we would live and operate on Banaba.

Soon we started to get the Amateur Radio equipment set up. I quickly erected my Butternut HF6V vertical and opened up as T33JS on 14222 kHz to let people know that we had arrived safely. The first QSO was with Don, J37AH, and Banaba Island was on the air. Gradually over the next day or so, the beam was assembled and erected and put to use. Other antennas were organised and we were both soon set in the routine of working the pile up. Bob carried the brunt of the CW operation, especially in the early days, whilst I concentrated on 20m SSB. The 6m beam was connected to the station and our 6m beacon on 50.110 MHz switched on. This frequency is monitored on an ongoing basis by 6m enthusiasts. However, it soon became obvious that the Cushcraft beam (leant by Willie) was not functioning. Something was drastically wrong with the SWR being excessive on all three bands.

Willy, T30AC, had been using the beam for many years and he mentioned that the SWR was high on 10m. Externally the beam looked in very good condition and although old, it had worn well. To avoid too much dismantling, the boom and inner sections of the individual elements had been kept intact. We had only removed the outer lengths of each element. These tips carried the multi-band traps for each element. The beam was then 'shipped' in this fashion and was readily re-assembled on Banaba. I decided to have a closer look at the beam; it would make a huge difference if it worked.

Luckily, a fairly long aluminium ladder was available. Using this and by climbing onto the roof I was able to remove the two driven element tips. I started to disassemble the traps and to try and check them and repair them if possible. Meanwhile, back in the shack, Bob kept the multitudes at bay.

I was unprepared for the explanation for the cause of the problem. In the tropics there are many varieties of wasps and bees, most of which use holes in wood as their nest site and as places to deposit their eggs. The traps of most beams have two or three drainage holes to let moisture escape. On taking the first trap apart (naturally we had brought tools with us) I realised what had happened.

Over the years, countless numbers of these small wasps or bees had entered the traps and left their various deposits inside. The ends of the traps were packed with a brown hard gunk, which I carefully removed with a screwdriver. This deposit had also been corrosive and some of the enamel insulation of the wire had also been destroyed. Generally speaking, this thick 'gunk' material was not conducive to good trap performance! Four traps later, some worse than others, I felt that we might now have a driven element that would work. I used nylon fishing line intertwined between the turns of the coil to separate and also insulate the turns.

On re-assembly the beam, had a much lower SWR and now performed better, and we had many QSOs using it. Over the coming days, as I had free time, the other traps were tackled but it was a time consuming job. However, apart from a final amplifier 572B tube going 'bang' in Bob's linear and some glitch with his keyer, we had few other problems.

For 40 and 80m I had brought a dual dipole along and this was arranged as an inverted Vee antenna using the apex (about 45 feet high) of the house. This was a reasonable height and we had good results on these bands. For use on 160m I rigged up an inverted "L" with several radials and this worked quite well. I used the defunct flag pole in front of Banaba House; the halyard had long since gone. By using the ladder and several lengths of thin saplings tied together, I was able to push a wire loop (complete with new halyard) to the top, a tug on this made it hold fast and this was used to pull up some 35 feet of vertical component of the inverted 'L' antenna. The horizontal section then went across to the roof of the house; it was a good example of a typical inverted 'L'. Now, much more could be done on the lower bands and Banaba proved to be a good location.

Meanwhile, the routine of operating, filling the generator, sleeping and eating continued. We tried to avoid both of us being asleep at the same time; if one quit for a couple of hours of sleep, the other was awakened to keep things moving. We were lucky in that 10m was open for hour after hour. With the exception of working few Europeans on this band, we did very well indeed. We tackled any antenna work and other chores around midday when band activity was quieter. One had to be very careful being outside at that time of day, because Banaba is one degree south of the equator. It was extremely hot.

We had a couple of good 6m openings with KH6IIA in Hawaii being the first QSO, and Kan, JA1BK, being the first JA station. Many were now reporting hearing our beacon which was running on the band signing T33JS. I operated on the band using both CW and SSB and in all made about 150 QSOs; this was not a bad result. Again, the season was not quite right, as a couple of months earlier conditions had been superb in the Pacific area.

Mutual interference between stations was never a major problem. We had moved the HF6 vertical from its initial position to increase antenna separation, so Bob and I were always able to operate at the same time.

As far as eating went, we were well taken care of. The Island council had arranged that we had someone to look after us. Rhea (and her husband) made sure that we had cooked rice available every day. She also helped prepare something for breakfast, lunch and dinner. She quickly learned that although the food was ready on the table, we did not immediately leave the pile up to eat; the food would be eaten in due course.

They often brought fresh fish; in fact every family on Banaba depended on fish as the main ingredient of their diet. You can't blame them; fish is readily available and is there for the taking. If they brought fish, we often gave tinned food in return. The fish was very good and we ate it on several occasions.

Banaba Island was extensively mined for phosphate between 1900 and 1979 at which point Kiribati became an independent nation and as a result phosphate mining stopped. Both the native Banabans and their island were to suffer in the process as their land was decimated. Most areas of the island now resemble the moon or another alien landscape. Thousands of jagged peaks of coral jut out over the land. The phosphate deposits and soil which originally covered these peaks had long since been mined and shipped overseas. In 1979 a huge stockpile of phosphate material remained, silently waiting for the ships that never came. The empty ships came under ballast which was usually fresh water. It is said by some that Banaba Island suffered the greatest environmental disaster of the 20th Century.

As time permitted I made my own way about the island. It is not very large and there were not many people around, I believe some 200 all together. They always smiled and said hello as I passed here and there, and in many ways it reminded me of Canton. The huge infrastructure is still in place, but slowly falling apart. There were areas for the Chinese labourers, another for the native quarters with yet another area reserved for the European community who worked for the company. I believe that there was also a married quarter housing area.

Like Canton, there was the engineering style infrastructure of workshops for motor vehicle repair, dump truck maintenance and welding, all waiting silently with nothing to do. Dozens of old cars and vehicles stood around, waiting and rusting away, just where they had been left years ago. All of these areas were slowly being consumed (the best word I can think of) by the steady march of vegetation living on meagre pickings. From the sea, on arrival, the island looked as though it was covered by a hazy net resulting in very few distinct inland areas.

In one post-mining report, it stated in effect that 90% of the island's surface had been stripped of phosphate. The coral pinnacles are all that remain. In the early days the Banabans, apart from receiving a pittance for their land, were promised that all land would be returned in a rehabilitated condition. They would have had no idea what would happen to their individual holdings. Soil was to be imported to replace all the deposits mined and the land would be much better than before. This promise, part of their contract to the population, was never honoured.

We were lucky in that Rhea and her husband turned up one day on 125cc motor bikes. We were in for a ride. The council had decided that we should be shown around and in particular we would visit the famous Bangabanga caves. In the past, these had been sacred areas as deep in these caves lay an endless supply of fresh water! Only women were allowed to enter them and recover water.

I was not a newcomer to caves as near Weston Super Mare there is a huge labyrinth of caves in the nearby Cheddar/Wells area. As we made our way into one cave, it brought back those memories. It was difficult moving down through the narrow entrances opening out into a huge cavern. Pools of fresh water moved slowly, and the beautiful formations of dripping rock fell from high above. These priceless areas were severely damaged during the phosphate and WWII eras.

WWII is a long time ago; I am old enough to remember it. The Japanese occupied Banaba with their usual ferocity. When it was all over, several officers were found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to death.

Post war, the Phosphate Company returned for business as usual and one can't help but think there is no justice in such situations.

After the caving, we looked around some more and I ended up on top of the huge phosphate stockpile. I had a wonderful view down to the gantry area. I could see how the phosphate had made its way down to the waiting ship lying just off shore in safe deep water. Even from this point the gantry arrangement looked massive, ready to stretch out to the waiting ship, dumping raw phosphate into the hold. So it was now time to return to the reality of the day. It had been a wonderful experience and I had taken numerous photos.

The Banabans are renowned as a friendly and courteous people and they certainly made us very welcome. They were impressed by our 27,000 QSOs and were surprised to hear that we had spoken to The Vatican, USA and dozens of European countries. We explained that many radio amateurs were now aware of Banaba Island, even if it was only a fleeting "You are 59, QSL"?

They gave us two 'island get-togethers', one organised by the Protestant church and the other by the Catholic Church. In each case they welcomed us to their island and asked if we had enjoyed our stay. We all had plenty to eat and there was much discussion and interest in both of us.

Now it was time to go, and as always in these situations, beams, masts and wire antennas all came down quicker that they had been put up. We packed away the rigs, cables, keyer and equipment until finally, in terms of Amateur Radio, Banaba Island was silent again. We then gave any remaining food, fuel and other items no longer needed to the Island, together with a small gift of tobacco, flour and sugar as a token of our thanks for the hospitality given to a couple of crazy radio amateurs in the name of DXing. The Banaba taxi, once again doing its rounds courtesy of the Catholic Mission, appeared outside the house. Soon all our gear was loaded on board and we headed for the wharf.

A couple of hours later we were safely on board the *Nei Mataburo,* which was getting ready to leave. After a restful and uneventful trip back, we tied up in Tarawa late on

Thursday afternoon. Bob and I were due to leave Tarawa next morning. The ship was very late in arriving and as a result, Bob and I had a mad scramble to meet our travel schedule out of Tarawa. At around four in the afternoon I finally cleared my own beam, which I had sent all those weeks previously, from airport customs. There was much to do; equipment was returned to Willy, Mote and Retite. Soon after, we were back in the hotel, ready for the flight early next morning.

Later, Bob and I celebrated the apparent success of the Banaba Island DXpedition. I then headed back for Norfolk Island, as arranged, to catch the MV Island DXpedition, which I had missed previously during my T31JS operation.

Bob made over 900 QSOs on RTTY, but, of course, by sharing the operating of T33JS, took a great deal off work of my shoulders Almost every day the pile up was enormous, and after some 27,200 QSOs it was all over.

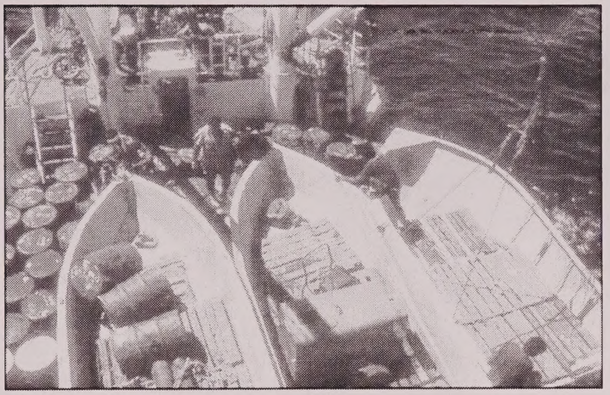
Bob and I parted company on Tuvalu where he stayed for about one week before leaving for home to operate as a T20 station. We had both enjoyed our stay on Banaba very much.

Thanks is due to; The Rambi Council and Banaba Island Council; OIC Banaba; Home Affairs Department; Director of Telecoms; Telecoms Licensing at Bairiki, Tarawa.

Band totals were:

160m	CW/SSB	1999
80m	CW	302
80m	SSB	398
40m	CW	1240
40m	SSB	415
20m	CW	2363
20m	SSB	7174
15m	CW	3264
15m	SSB	4607
10m	CW	2397
10m	SSB	4046
Total		26,405
RTTY		826
Grand Total		27,231 QSOs.

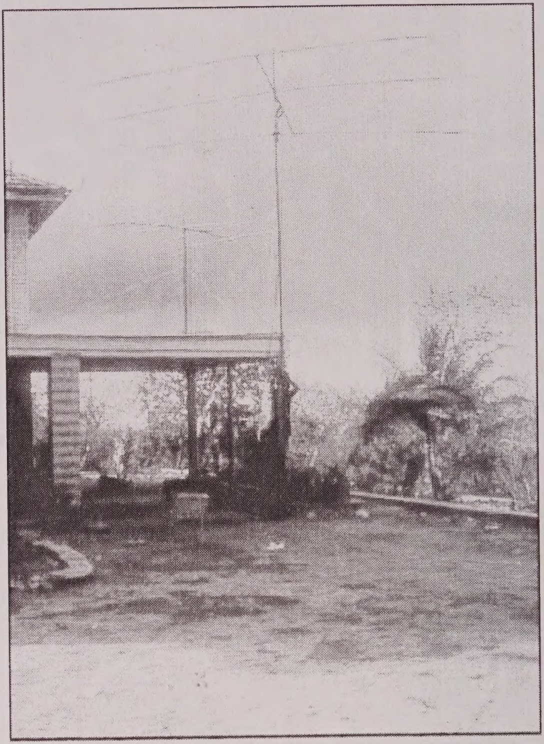
As we know now, Banaba was accepted as a new DXCC country and all the above QSOs counted for DXCC.



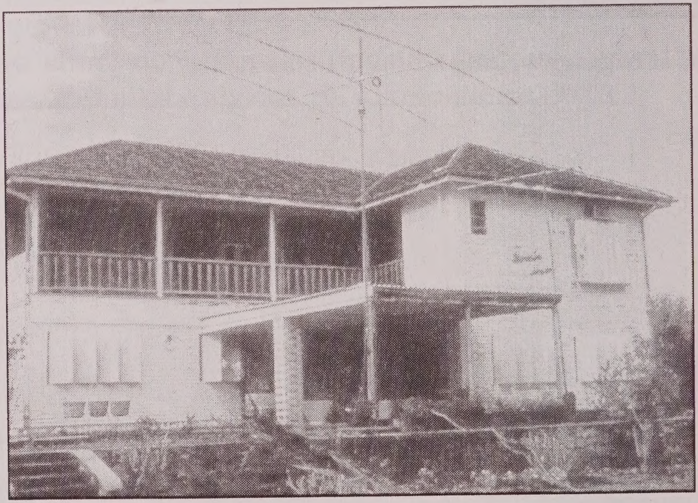
Fuel drums, to be put ashore on Banaba Island.

Loads of baggage waiting for the 'Banaba Taxi'.

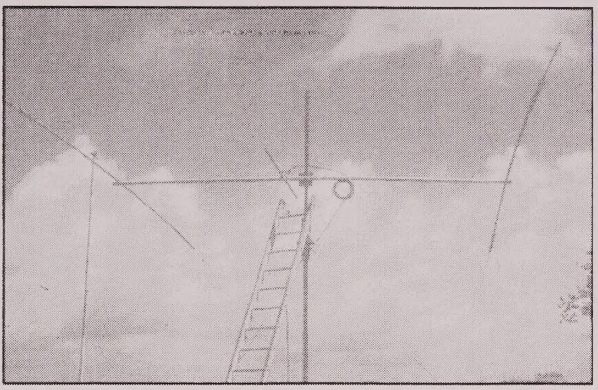
Ready to raise the HF beam with rotator and mast.



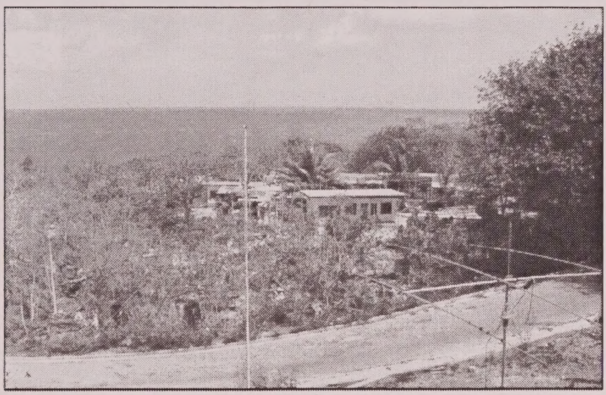
HF and 6m beams used on Banaba Island.



Ocean House, the HQ of the old Phosphate Company.

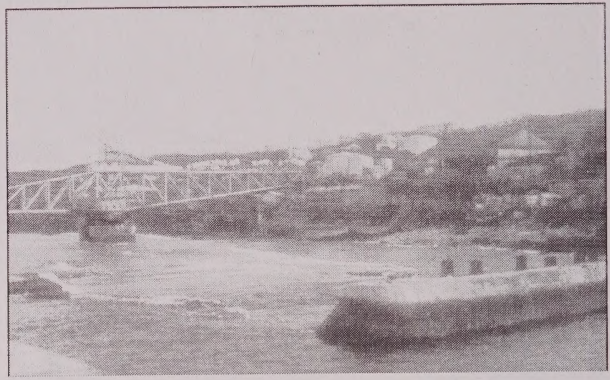


Fixing the faulty traps of TA 33 beam, Banaba Island.



View from the roof of Ocean House, Banaba Island.

Time to fill up the generator for the T31 operation.



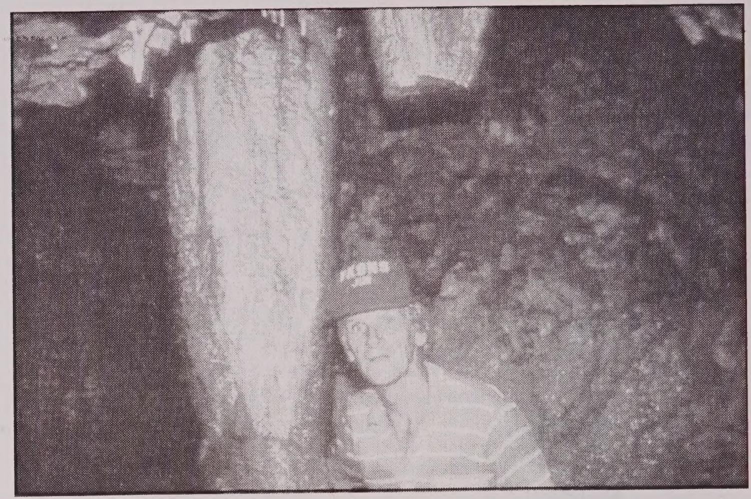
Old Phosphate loading gantry, Banaba Island.

Drying the fish catch, Banaba Island.

An Island feast Banaba Island style.

Old British Post Office Box, Banaba Island.

Taxi service, off to see the famous caves of Banaba Island.



Huge stalactite in the underground caves of Banaba Island.

Close up of stalactite Banaba Island.

Chapter 22

THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

A51JS 21 Mar – 10 April 1990

When I stepped on the plane at Norfolk Island that Sunday in March of 1990, it was hard to believe that my destination was to be the Kingdom of Bhutan. The very name of this remote and isolated country conjured up all sorts of images. The little that I had read seemed to indicate a move on the part of the country into the 20th century. H. M. Jigme Wangchuck, ruler of the land of Druk (the Thunder Dragon), has steadily moved his country forward, on many occasions embracing Western technology. Yet magically, so far, he has been able to keep the country's culture intact. Tourist entries were kept to a minimum so that visitors witnessed real-life rather than the tourist-oriented hype found in so many places.

I had become interested in Bhutan as a result of an article I had read in the late eighties. The article appeared in an Australian radio magazine and the person concerned had visited the Wireless Division, and there, in one of his photographs, was a TA 33 beam!!

I had written several letters to Sherab Dorji, Chief Engineer, in the Wireless Division with regard to the possibility of obtaining an Amateur Radio license. Over the coming weeks and months, it seemed as though things might be on the move. I received two replies from him, and in one reply his office telephone number was on the note paper used.

In those days, although we had an excellent telephone system on Norfolk Island, making a connection to Thimphu was very difficult. This entailed dialling New Delhi, India, and, once through, requesting a connection to a Thimphu telephone number e.g. 22805. The Delhi operator on a manual switchboard then dialled the Thimphu number and, with luck, one was through to the Bhutan number.

These initial telephone calls to the Wireless Division in Thimphu became a saga of endurance. I can still hear the disbelief in Sherab Dorji's voice, on that first successful telephone call. "Is this really you Mr. Smith?" We had several conversations in the coming months, and this more intimate approach paid off.

Suddenly, it all became a reality as I had received the Telex from Thimphu which said in part: "Permission is granted to enter Bhutan as a common tourist. Amateur Radio permission will be granted on arrival, subject to checks of radio equipment." Thus, in three years of communication and contact with the government of Bhutan, a germ of an idea had apparently come to fruition. With this Telex I now had permission to enter Bhutan; for example it would give authorization for the purchase of plane tickets.

A few years earlier, one had to enter Bhutan at its southern border with India, through the southern foothills of the Himalayas. One such point was Phuntsholing. After entering Bhutan, several hours of travel later, via a winding, climbing thread of a road clinging to the edge of the mountains, the traveller arrived at Thimphu, the capital. The road started off at a tropical 500 feet above sea level, rising to just over 7,500 feet in Thimphu, which nestles in a valley, almost surrounded by high mountains on all sides.

My journey by air was to be much easier: Norfolk Island, Auckland, Bangkok, then Dhaka in Bangladesh, and finally landing at Paro in Bhutan. It was a mad rush to get things organized. I left Norfolk Island with two rigs, an ICOM 740 and an ICOM 751 (JA version), RTTY equipment, 30 m of coax, a Butternut HF6V vertical antenna, and the usual mountain of other bits and pieces. Looking ahead for a moment, several things did not gel. Promised items from Japan and the US simply did not arrive due to air freight difficulties on the Bangkok to Bhutan leg. As a result, there was no beam, no additional coax (for other antennas), no 6m rig and other important items.

However, I physically carried a great deal more. On check-in at Norfolk Island, I was carrying 70 kg of excess baggage; I was used to having several items of baggage, and invariably tried to carry a rig on board as cabin baggage.

It was later, in Auckland, that I had my first shock. A change of airline schedule had me leaving on Thai Airways for Bangkok several hours earlier than planned. As I checked in at the Thai counter, the girl was quick to point out that my baggage was overweight. And she wasn't very happy with my 12 kg of cabin baggage either. Ten minutes later, I had spent just over US $750 on excess baggage, despite her slashing almost 30 kilograms off my official weight and closing her eyes to my weighty 'cabin baggage.' A charge for 30 kg at US $25 per kilo was disillusionment indeed.

Several hours later, we landed at Bangkok Airport. I have nothing but praise for the air port facilities there. I approached the Customs Officer with caution but, with just a moment's explanation, I was waved through with a smile. A few minutes later, with real Thai currency in my pocket, I was in a taxi on my way to the hotel in town.

I had planned for three nights in Bangkok. Most importantly, I had to finalise my travel to Bhutan. I would be issued an 'extended stay' visa, and purchase my return ticket to Paro, Bhutan. The ticket was issued after a payment of some US $ 690. In addition to this, I also spent part of Monday and Tuesday trying to locate that freight (ex the US and Japan) that I was sure was waiting for the flight to Bhutan. I was then ready for the flight due to leave on Wednesday morning.

They meant MORNING! With check-in time at 0630, and an hour's drive from town to the airport, I was up at the crack of dawn. I was really worried about the excess baggage, with visions of much of it being off-loaded, but check-in at the Druk Airline counter was uneventful. The check-in girl was delightful, hardly batting an eyelid as my main items were handed over. Then she spotted my cabin baggage. "Perhaps it would be more comfortable if it was loaded with the rest," she suggested. Not a murmur as the scales went up another 12 kg. After a very token charge of US $200 (compared to Thai Air), I was breathing freely again.

The approach to Paro seems to be a real test of pilot skill (not to mention passenger nerve) as the plane sets down, winding and twisting through the mountain valleys. It reminded me of the approach to Kai Tak, Hong Kong, which is another stomach churner. Finally, we were on the ground and disembarking at the airport in the fertile Paro valley, 6,500 feet above sea level. It is a stunning area and the beauty of the air port is spell-binding. That first visual meeting, on the walk from the plane, the highly decorated terminal lay just ahead, its frontage covered with the wonderful art of Bhutan.

I had declared some US $4,000 worth of Amateur Radio equipment, so I was mildly concerned about Customs clearance. Once in the terminal, I soon spotted Sherab Dorji of the Wireless Division; I knew his face from a magazine picture I had seen. After our formal introduction, he took my custom's declaration form. Each of my items were then cleared through customs into my hands, and we were soon outside with everything loaded onto Sherab's vehicle. After some further introductions and lunch at the airport it was confirmed that permission to operate Amateur Radio would be granted. Thimphu, our actual destination, was a couple of hours drive away. I was able to relax.

The journey to Thimphu, a few thousand feet higher than Paro, became my introduction to the winding, climbing roads of Bhutan. The sealed road was in excellent condition and, as we climbed higher and higher out of Paro, the views were tremendous.

By the time I had checked into the Hotel Motithang and all my baggage was safely unloaded, it was late afternoon. It had been wonderful to finally meet Sherab, and I liked him immediately. Pradhan, A51PN was waiting at the hotel and the three of us we sat around relaxing and talking about my journey from Norfolk Island. Sherab then decided to look at the radio equipment in more detail. With several willing helpers, we soon had the main items unpacked. The equipment was put on a very convenient table in the corner of the room, over by a large ground floor window.

A look out of the window showed that getting the HF6V Butternut vertical organized would be easy. Indeed, with the help of Sherab and one of the hotel staff, we assembled the antenna and erected it within 30 minutes (I had it colour coded for quick assembly). I then ran the coaxial cable across the ground and finally slipped it through the window frame. There was one slight hiccup; the plug of my multi-point extension cord would not fit into the hotel room power point. A quick fix was required, (please turn your head away for a moment) involving the use of matches to hold the stripped cable ends into the wall socket. Although not for the faint-hearted, power was now available for the rig. The next day, after a quick trip to the local electrical shop in town, I had a safe power connection to the hotel power outlet.

I switched on the IC-751 transceiver and, after a few minutes of quick demonstration of the main controls and a discussion about power output and frequencies, Sherab now gave me the go-ahead to operate, and I chose to operate 20m CW.

My first CQ call using A51JS was answered at 1143 UTC on 21st March and, after an eight-year lapse, the Kingdom of Bhutan was once again active on the Amateur Radio bands. This QSO between A51JS and Anton, YB5BZ was on 20m CW on 14020 kHz. This statement does not really do justice to the actual situation, nor is a true reflection of the tremendous trust and genuine interest shown by the Wireless Division of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Eight years is a long time in Amateur Radio terms. It means, for example, that thousands of hams had never heard Pradhan, A51PN, who, for over four years, in the late '70s, had been the sole 'voice' of Bhutan.

Sherab Dorji of the Wireless Division mentally copied this first QSO and many subsequent ones. He was smiling broadly. Was he also glad that Amateur Radio was on its way again? I really like to think so. The eruption on the 20m band increased as more and more people realized that they were listening to activity from Bhutan. Just over an hour later, I picked up Kan, JA1BK, on CW, followed by a quick QSY to SSB. This was the first A5 SSB phone contact in over eight years. Kan, an old friend, kindly telephoned Kirsti, VK9NL, and, a day earlier than expected, Kirsti and I were in QSO. Shortly after, there was a break for an hour or so.

Sherab and Pradhan now had to leave, but we arranged an appointment for the next morning to finalize permission. I would receive an official letter of A51JS authorization. In the meantime, if I wished to continue to operate, that was agreeable.

Sherab and others were determined about one thing - I had to be shown something of Bhutan. I was not going to sit in front of the rig day after day; there were things to see and do. As a result, I did four main things during my stay: I slept, I operated Amateur Radio, I became a tourist (without really realizing it), and, over the coming days and weeks, I grew to respect the Bhutanese people more and more. They have to be one of the most open and honest people in the world. I discussed Amateur Radio at length. I spent many hours with Sherab and Pradhan, discussing Amateur Radio regulations, frequency allocation, power, band planning, and so on. I had prepared an extensive paper on the Amateur Radio Service embracing these important areas.

There was some frustration in operating from Bhutan in mid-Winter in those early days. I found it really cold and sometimes uncomfortable, and there were many power cuts. Sometimes the power cuts lasted only a few minutes, sometimes an hour, and sometimes longer. It seemed to me that on occasions, Murphy picked the most inconvenient times; usually late afternoon as the band was opening up to the US, and often in the middle of my sked with Kirsti, VK9NL.

Propagation openings, especially to the different areas of the US, were very short. I used the DX Edge (that magic piece of plastic), and it really helped to keep an eye on possible propagation times. Gradually, the QSO total rose, and more East Coast, West Coast, USA, South America, Europe, and other areas were worked. I worked many JA stations as they were almost always in skip.

The Butternut HF6V vertical was actually at 7,500 feet (2756 metres). However, the hotel was tucked up at the end of a valley with mountains all around. At times, the incoming signals (in particular those from the US) were almost unreadable due to flutter. I put this down to polar effects, but I also think that there were many multi-path reflections because of the surrounding mountains. (At later meetings, several US amateurs, and others, commented that there were wide variations of beam headings for the A51JS signals).

Quite often, my power output was a mere 80 watts on CW. It often seemed tome that the AC line voltage was very low, but I never actually measured it. Also, I often felt that I was copying stations for longer than they were hearing me. I have no doubt that a small linear would have really helped. Incidentally, with the usual DXpedition approach of "you are 59," it is easy to be lulled into believing these signal strengths. Often, signals did not move the S meter - "You're 59, QSL?" Often, the signal was S4 or S5 but "you are 59 - QSL?" was the report I gave and received. I eventually worked on five bands, namely 80m through 10m.

I stayed away from the new WARC bands because I didn't want to rock the boat. I could certainly claim 80m - 10m bands as exclusively radio amateur (more or less) but I did not want to cause any problems with possible QRM on other bands; perhaps these bands were not even recognized in the country or region. Still, I had the usual requests: "When will you be on the 30, 17 and 12m bands?" From the JA stations, "Will you be on FM on 29 MHz"? It is often hard to please everyone.

One of the thrills of getting on RTTY was that, as far as I have been able to find out, the Kingdom of Bhutan had never been available on this mode. It was strange, but this mode really fascinated my friends in Wireless Division. I believe that having a screen read-out had much to do with it. I demonstrated the TONO 9000 and its keyboard Morse, automatic Morse readout, random Morse generation, and so on. It was a huge success. The first ever RTTY OSO took place between Gin, JA1ACB, and A51JS on the second day of operation. Again, judging by the pile up, it was a popular mode with hams in general. A beam would have really helped, and the pile-up QRM was tremendous. It would have been better to use FSK, or pick up some receiver selectivity, as the SSB filter is much too wide when using AFSK.

Finally, back in the relatively cold of Thimphu, I was soon wrapped up once again in my regulation clothes (two pairs of socks, vest, shirt, pullover and parka). In the room there was a small blower type heater of about 1 kW rating. With the low voltage, I reckoned it was maybe about 700 Watts. The heater helped, but the room was enormous with a very high ceiling, and it was February in Bhutan with Thimphu lying at 7,500 feet.

I met Pradhan, A51PN, on several occasions and we got on very well together. I had spoken to him many times whilst I was in Papua New Guinea as P29JS. I was sorry that he was not able to operate, but of course it is not really my place to make comment as to why this had happened. However, it seemed that there were a couple of formalities to complete and he would be back on the air.

In various discussions with Sherab, I mentioned that I would like to meet Yonten, ex AC5TY, A51TY. This was arranged, and despite being a very busy government official, Dasho Yonten gave me a warm welcome. We had a courteous meeting in his office, and we talked about old times, his travels and activities as AC5TY and A51TY.

I was very lucky in that Sherab. In his capacity as Deputy Chief Engineer, he showed me around several of the Bhutan Wireless out-stations. He also knew that I had been a Radio Inspector for the CAA in Papua New Guinea. He, too, had an extensive job overlooking the activities of the various wireless communication stations; there was an extensive network in the Kingdom. A great deal of the traffic was made by using CW, so all of the operators (including Sherab) were very proficient in Morse code. The out-station equipment was usually driven by batteries, (with charger) and operated on a multi-channel SSB/CW link. All circuits were very busy.

This inspection tour gave me an opportunity to see several areas of the country. Sherab was a wonderful tour guide; his knowledge of the country staggering. He asked me if there was anything in particular I would like to see. So I asked for two things; one to see a Yeti, and the other a Yak. Sherab smiled and said that it would be an impossible task for the Yeti, as they loved the springtime. However, what colour of Yak did I want to see; a white Yak or a black Yak? When I jokingly told him that I could not make up my mind, he showed me both of them. He knew exactly where there was a herd with several white Yaks in it. The black variety was simplicity itself.

In Thimphu, at the Wireless Division, I also attended one of the Morse classes training new operators. After using a Bencher paddle for so many years, my brass pounding was very rusty. Still, it's like riding a bike (so they say), once learned, never forgotten. Within a few minutes, I could feel my confidence returning. My fist gradually improved to send tolerable Morse on a straight key. It all reminded me so much of Car Nicobar and my Morse lessons from Fitz. It was all good fun, and they were all laughing their heads off!

On top of this station there was 'that' TA 33 tri-band beam, which had caught my attention months ago. It had started me on the road to Bhutan, and I asked Sherab to take a photograph of me, up on the roof beside it!! I was tempted to ask if I could borrow it for a week. But it was in use on a very busy Indian circuit running just below the bottom edge of 20 m. By all accounts, the circuit was 'solid' most of the time. This used a YAESU FT 101 transceiver as the main station for its traffic to India!

After some discussion with Sherab I made a decision to leave the complete station in Thimphu. I left an ICOM 740, my trusty Butternut HF6V, a microphone, an AT200 antenna tuner, and some coax cable. Hopefully Pradhan would shortly receive authorisation to operate once again. As events showed, he never came back on the air despite the availability of a donated station.

This transaction was made as a documented gift to the Wireless Division, hopefully for future Amateur Radio use.

It also meant that I could use the rig more or less until I was due to leave. There would be no need to QRT the evening before, but Murphy had one final say. The propagation was so terrible that my planned final multi-hour marathon came to nothing. At about 2300 local time I had finished my packing, and my operation as A51JS was over. A rough QSO count had my total well over 14,500 QSOs.

Early Wednesday morning, Sherab had come to collect me. I soon had my belongings onboard his vehicle and I we left the Motithang Hotel, Thimphu for Paro Airport. I felt a strong feeling of sadness; it had been a wonderful experience, with Sherab and everyone being so friendly. The Druk Airline plane left on schedule, and so it was good-bye to Bhutan after my 10 day stay. The plane landed at Dhaka picking up a few passengers and fuel; we were not allowed off the plane. By lunch time I was back in Bangkok for another two-day transit stay.

During this stay in Bangkok, I arranged to get all my excess baggage booked through to Norfolk Island as unaccompanied baggage, which was a much cheaper solution. In Bangkok I had a very strange feeling that it had all been a dream. Had anyone really worked A51JS? Had I really been in Bhutan?

Back at home on Norfolk Island on the Saturday afternoon, my mind was set at rest. On the Monday morning the inevitable pile of mail awaited my return home. A great deal of it was for A51JS.

I would like to thank many people, but if I thank Sherab Dorji of the Wireless Division, perhaps that is enough. Without his continued efforts on my behalf and, for that matter, on behalf of Amateur Radio in the Kingdom of Bhutan, A51JS would never have become a reality. I did not know it then, but this visit would lead to a long association with the country and the Wireless Division, Thimphu. Then, finally the Amateur Radio Service would be officially entrenched in law; however this is jumping the gun by a few years!

Tashi Delek (May your journey be a safe one).

Here is the telegram of invitation which I received on Norfolk Island. The TELEX from Bhutan dated 09 March 1990 read:

MR J.B. SMITH, PRESIDENT OF HIDXA
NORFOLK ISLAND
SOUTH PACIFIC 2899
AUSTRLIA 2899

OTC OVERSEAS TELEGRAM - DELIVERED BY AP –

AS PER OUR TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION REGARDING YOUR VISIT TO BHUTAN AS COMMON TOURIST IS ACCEPTED BY THE DIRECTOR OF TOURISM, WE ARE INFORMED BY THE DIRECTOR OF TOURISM THAT TRAVEL DOCUMENTS AND OTHER IMPORTANT FORMS WHICH ARE REQUIRED TO BE FILLED UP BY YOU ARE BEING SENT TO YOU. REGARDING PERMISSION FOR YOU OPERATING AMATEUR RADIO FROM BHUTAN WILL BE GRANTED IN YOUR NAME TO THE DIRECTOR OF TOURISM AFTER MAKING THOROUGH CHECKING OF YOUR EQUIPMENTS BY CUSTOMS OFFICIALS AT THE AIRPORT. DETAIL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR EQUIPMENTS RANGE OF FREQUENCY AND TIME PERIOD MAY BE INDICATED IN TOURISM FORM. REGARDS.

NB: The Telex contained a couple of typos and for the sake of clarity I have corrected them. The remainder of the required formalities was conducted by fax. For example, those application forms arrived safely, and were completed and then returned by fax almost immediately. The remainder of the story is within the pages of this Chapter. I personally regard this Telex as one of the most important moments in my Amateur Radio life. For sheer openness and trust, it surely takes on a special position in the world of Amateur Radio.

My actual permission for a 10 days stay was highly unusual, as tourist permits were usually issued for only a few days. The sheer expense of accommodation, in Bhutan, limited my option to that 10 day period. I have always remembered the kindness and generosity of the Bhutanese.

A51JS QSO Breakdown:

Band	SSB	CW
10m	1,607	1,682
15m	2,537	2,105
20m	2,767	3,056
40m	10	828
80m	-	98
Subtotal:	6,921	7,769

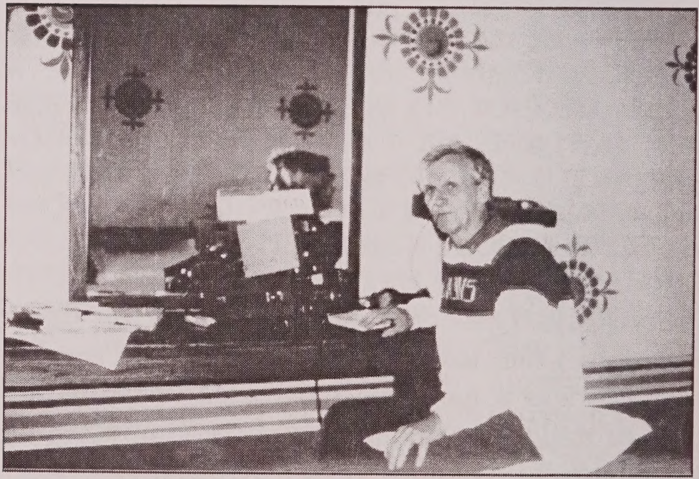
Plus RTTY: 182

Total QSOs in the log: 14,872.

For my A51JS QSL card I selected one of the many photographs I had taken during my stay and travels. The final choice was a hard one but I used one showing one method of moving material around the country. This was part of a pack train of horses and mules loaded with goods. I had many favourable comments on the A51JS card.

MOTITHANG HOTEL

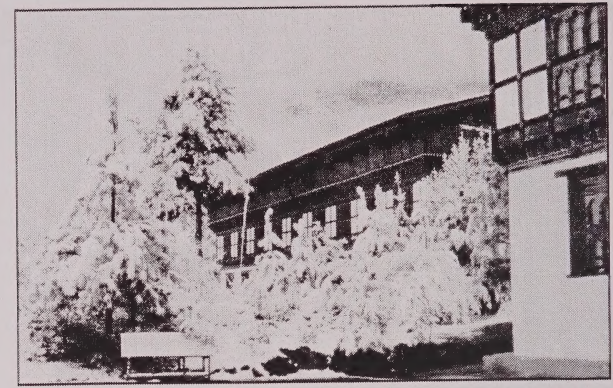
Jim, A51JS, receptionist and Sherab Dorje at Hotel.



Initial place of operating A51JS in my hotel room.

Modest A51JS station, Motithang hotel room, Thimphu.

Jim, A51JS and Pradhan, A51PN.



Hotel grounds in winter, HF6V in the background.

Paro Zhong, religious centre of Buddhism in the district.

Sherab Dorje views books donated by ARRL.

Sherab Dorje, Pradhan and Jim.

“Anyone for tea?” Sherab and Jim having a roadside break.

Chapter 23

FROM THE LAND OF THE BENGAL TIGER

Amateur Radio in the P.R. of Bangladesh.
S21U, 22 March 1991.

Since February 1990, I had been dealing with government departments in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, trying to get permission to operate Amateur Radio in the country. The year before, armed with a direct invitation from the office of the Prime Minister, Mr. Kaji Jaffar Ahmed, I had arranged to be in Dhaka after my stay in Bhutan. A visa was issued for the visit, and I made appropriate airline bookings to arrive in Dhaka ex Thimphu on the 11th April 1990.

A few days before I had finished my operation as A5IJS in Bhutan, a JA Group operating as S21U, and Vince, K5VT, operating as S20VT appeared on the Amateur Radio bands. It therefore seemed no longer necessary for me to go to Dhaka. After all, Bangladesh was on the air, and this had been the idea in the first place. I therefore cancelled my Dhaka stop-over.

In response to a letter received in October 1990 from Dhaka, I again continued to deal with the government of Bangladesh. My file had been transferred to the Ministry of Information and I soon found myself involved in a long drawn out situation with officials who did their best to help. The basic problem was simple: "Amateur Radio is banned in the P.R. of Bangladesh and there is no legislation to permit the hobby". The more I was in touch, the more I realised how difficult things would be. Nevertheless, there appeared to be an interest and a desire to get the hobby started.

On the 13th of February, 1991, (with the support of the High Commissioner in Canberra and other officials in Dhaka), I received an official 'Telex of Invitation' from the Ministry of Information in Dhaka. As a result of the telex, I made immediate arrangements to travel to Dhaka.

On applying for my visa, I was advised to delay my arrival in Dhaka until a couple of weeks after the current elections were over. These elections were scheduled to be held on the 27th February 1991. It was hoped elections would put a democratic government in power to replace the regime of President Ershad.

With my visa issued, I made firm travel arrangements, and my arrival in Dhaka was now scheduled for the 10th March 1991. I informed all DX outlets that I anticipated being able to operate for two weeks. On the telephone, I had oral agreement 'in principle', that CW and RTTY would be permitted on a demonstration basis.

On the 5th March, out of the blue, I received a second telex from Dhaka stating that "At the moment, Amateur Radio permission could not be given - any inconvenience caused was regretted". Needless to say, I felt very disappointed; the recent months of negotiations had now been wasted. All involved tried hard over the next couple of days to get the matter resolved, but, shortly after, I cancelled all my travel arrangements.

The newly elected democratic government, which had in fact thrown President Ershad out of office, was now taking charge of the government departments.

Nevertheless, as pointed out by the Bangladesh High

Commission in Canberra, "The recent 'Telex of Invitation' received was official, was still valid, and my visa had been issued against this invitation". It was important that this visa was used, even if the government had changed, as a matter of principle! Politics, Politics!

A week later, after much discussion with Kirsti and other HIDXA members, I made the decision to go to Dhaka. In this manner I would deal in a direct fashion with the many officials I knew and perhaps yield results. I duly arrived in Dhaka on Friday, the 22nd of March being the fifth day of the month of Ramadan. This is an important month for the Muslims of the world, and the faithful fast during the daylight hours. As a result of this, the working day has to be adjusted. Since there is no lunch break, work finishes earlier, and, in fact, all of the government offices close at 3 pm.

I stayed at the Dhaka Sheraton, an expensive luxury for what I had in mind. It had one major advantage for me, both the Telecomm and Telephone office, (T&T), and the National Broadcasting Authority, (NBA) government buildings were within walking distance. Was it an omen for future events, that to get to T&T, one turned right, and to get to the NBA building, one turned to the left? I had been in touch with both of these government offices over several months.

Next day, the Saturday morning, I made a start on establishing my connections with the various departments. Mr. KS Hussein, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Information, sent a car to pick me up from the hotel. He had been a staunch friend during the protracted letter, fax, telex and telephone routines of recent months.

After the Ministry of Information Office (MIO) meeting, I went to both the T&T Offices and those of the NBA. Soon after, I had my first of many meetings with government officials in other related departments, and we reached broad agreement that I would be able to operate, with certain restrictions as to the use of frequencies. It was agreed that the NBA (which had suitable facilities) would be responsible for monitoring. The NBA engineering staff would also oversee and assist with my operation using the previously authorised S21U callsign. In fact, the operation took place from the office of the monitoring section of the NBA

On the basis of these discussions, I submitted an official written request, giving suggested SSB, CW and RTTY frequencies. I made use of the extensive facilities of the Dhaka Sheraton hotel which boasted a Word Processor, typewriters and a decent photocopier. The letter was in the system first thing on Monday morning, and I was certain that prompt action would be taken. I telephoned Kirsti to update her on the situation, and she in turn informed the DX outlets that I would be on the air in a couple of days. I expected that, as a result of the monitoring requirement, there would be some restrictions as to my actual operating times. It was also planned that some simple propagation studies would be carried out for the NBA (they had an AM service of Bangladesh Radio in the 15 MHz band).

The next few days were frustrating. The new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Gulam Khaleda Zia, had now completed it's take-over of government affairs. Many Ministries were being re-organised, and changes made to the staff of the previous government on an almost daily basis. The Chairman of the T&T Board and the Director General of the NBA were both required to approve my request. They were both busy men, as a result of the current situation. The days finished early for me. When that 3 pm daily cut off time came along, there was nothing to be done until next day.

I tried to get out and about in Dhaka to see something of the place and the people. I was also able to meet many officials outside their normal working daily schedule. This was on occasions difficult as all had religious commitments, with family, prayers and breaking of fast during Ramadan. I was lucky as Andrew Flint invited me to travel with him to the northern border area of the country. Andrew had worked in Bangladesh for many years and represented a well known Tea company in the country. The area to be visited was one of their tea plantations.

Since it was a long weekend holiday he had planned this visit to the area. It meant a train journey to and from Dhaka railway station to the railway station closest to the plantation. From there a simple hour or so trip by car would have us arriving at the tea plantation where the company had an office and also a house available for guests. So with luck we would have 2 or 3 days at the plantation proper; it sounded a great idea.

The train journey from Dhaka was quite an experience and travelling first class certainly made for a comfortable journey - it became quickly apparent at the station that 3rd Class travel would be rather cramped! It was quite an experience to see the countryside of Bangladesh unfold and we passed through many areas of high agricultural activity.

We arrived at the destination railway station and as I recall things, we were on time. A company vehicle and driver was there to meet us and shortly after we arrived at the plantation itself. Andrew introduced me to the station manager and then he was updated on various matters. After a couple of hours with several refreshment breaks we duly headed over to the company house. The house was very nice, typical old British Colony style, roomy and light with those mandatory ceiling fans. The area was much cooler as we were in the lower highland area of the country. I was soon settled in a very comfortable room which was self contained. An hour or so later we had a call to a meal and after some talk about tomorrow we called it a day,

Next morning, after breakfast had been served, Andrew said it was plantation time. He had explained something of what lay ahead during the train journey, now it was to be for real. He said I would be looked after at various areas as he himself continued to deal with estate affairs. He would re-join me as soon as he was able.

It is hard to explain the crash course during which everyone did their best to turn me into a tea planter and manager! Starting at the area of the tea plants themselves I was shown how the plants were cared for. As they grew, in due time they would supply the raw tea leaf tips. Then, to make the point, it was off to a section of a real plantation where the tea was being picked by female labour. It took me back a few years to one of the first TV adverts about tea – we use only the finest tips!! Well sure enough, the pickers were picking literally the green tips of each branch. A few quick moves and a bundle of these tips were thrown over their shoulder into a waiting bag made of cloth; this was held by a band from the back over the forehead of the woman in question. In due course a full bag was then carried over to a central point and dumped and an empty bag given in return. One more thing had to be done - namely the weight of the full back had to be credited to the picker's wage account. She then headed back to start the process again. I have forgotten just how many bags each woman picked but I recall being surprised!!

I then followed the picked tea on it journey through the 'works' which had many stages. After some grading, the tea went through a fermentation process. It was dried and re-sorted and so on though several cycles,. This included grading of the product, as Andrew explained this was a highly skilled task - reputations of tea companies and dealers could stand and fall by this grading process. All knew exactly what was called for in this or that market. The tea was being packing into these wonderful plywood teas chests which many of you will have see. This immediately brought back memories of packing our possessions in

Singapore, and of moves around Germany and England.

Needless to say I found the couple of days much too short as I was fascinated by the whole process. Then Andrew had one more idea. He called me over to the car and once again we headed out of the plantation onto the road and some time later we stopped and got out. By this time the road had petered out really into little more than a track. I followed him as he headed into the verge and shortly after he stopped, pointing to a couple of trees nearby. It took me a minute to see what he was looking at; it seemed that these trees were marked around their trunk. He took a couple of more steps and stood astride – hands on hips. "My right leg is in India and my left leg is still in Bangladesh. Come on and try it - it is a strange situation and feeling". I couldn't resist this, as it suddenly brought back memories of my standing across a line dividing Scotland from England many years previously.

I thoroughly enjoyed the weekend – I had learned a great deal and Andrew and plantation staff had given of their best. All too soon we were back in Dhaka after another pleasant train journey. The following day I was be back to dealing with the Amateur Radio plans for Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, at the official level, Amateur Radio was viewed with some suspicion; misunderstanding and misinformation ruled their thoughts. Despite this, we achieved a great deal through meetings held with much fruitful discussion. All these discussions were in the name of Amateur Radio. Much discussion arose over the use of radio transmitters and perceived problems with National Security. Why would anyone wish to operate a radio transmitter and receiver as a hobby?

It should also be remembered that these comments came from officials in the communications areas, and I hoped that some of the misconceptions would be cleared up. At least I tried to give an honest appraisal of the Amateur

Radio service, and not at all in terms of competitive DXCC activities.

The talks continued, and it became apparent to all of the departments concerned that Amateur Radio would not be a security risk after all. Not in the world of today, with the FAX machine, modems, computers, and instant satellite communications. If someone wanted to be a spy, Amateur Radio would have to be a last resort. As we all know, there are thousands who listen to the traffic on the Amateur Radio bands. I described, at one meeting, that transmitting on the Amateur Radio bands is the equivalent of going into the streets of Dhaka and yelling "secrets" at the top of one's voice! That raised a few smiles and a laugh; all knew that the streets of Dhaka were busy places.

Quite late on the evening of Tuesday, 2nd April, I received a telephone call confirming that everything had been finally approved. It took another 22 hours before the written permission, in Bengali, was in my hands. This letter enabled me to go ahead and set up the modest station S21U. Operation was, however, restricted to the use of SSB on three frequencies, one for use on each of the 20, 15 and 10m bands. My letter of authority did not give permission for any other mode; there was still a perception of monitoring difficulties.

Many Bangladeshi Nationals were interested in a mechanism that would permit them to become radio amateurs. In fact, the Bangladesh Amateur Radio League (BARL) was already in existence and it had many national members. Several of the BARL members turned up at NBA while I was operating. They were allowed to say hello and give their names during QSOs. HIDXA and our membership were now committed to assisting Amateur Radio in Bangladesh, if at all possible. I left a set of 1990 Call Books, various Amateur Radio books, magazines, and other Amateur Radio related material.

Several Foreign Nationals had lived and worked for many years in Bangladesh, of whom several worked within aid programmes. Some were radio amateurs and they, too, had not been able to get permission to operate. Despite Amateur Radio being banned, the authorities were aware that a few unauthorised activities had taken place - this had done little to show that the Amateur Radio service as a responsible body, complying with rules and regulations. One should not forget the basic rules of our hobby; an Amateur Radio license is required, or authority or written permission (from a relevant body) is needed, before one is allowed to utilise the allocated Amateur Radio bands. This is an ITU/IARU regulation.

The JA group operating S21U in 1990 had left a tri-band beam and other antennas. I had requested, whilst waiting for the written permission to operate, that I be allowed to get the beam elements unpacked and get antennas organised. This request failed; as it was thought that this would be seen to pre-empt any possible permission. As a result, I had no time to sort out the JA beam from a large pile of aluminium tubing which was, in fact, the hardware of several antennas. I decided that using my authorised period to operate was the way to go; this would, at least, be more productive.

With a quick trip upstairs to the roof of the NBA building, I was able to work on the multi-band, multi-legged dipole left there by the JA Group. Some hurried work by me and a couple of helpers soon had the wire elements stretched out. A couple of the legs were tied off to various pipes to clear the roof area. The dipole looked as though it would work, and except for one leg (which was fixed later), the antenna was now in the clear and high enough. Incidentally, when I did get that other leg of wire stretched out properly, it made a tremendous difference to the signal. I now had an antenna that worked!

Murphy was not finished however; a further hiccup meant that I could not use either of the two rigs left in 1990.

They were incompatible with the available 13.8V DC power supply unit. Again, in the traditions of field day and DXpeditions, I had to make do with a quick fix on the Kenwood TS 440S, as this was the easiest rig to deal with. After I made up a suitable lead (don't look!), the rig was connected to that available 13.8V DC power supply and I was in business.

I set up the rig on one of the work benches, and plugged in the coax from the multiband dipole antenna. I used a separate log for each of the three permitted frequencies and I arranged a multi-headset output terminal for monitoring arrangements. S21U hit the air! Maybe 'hit' is somewhat of an overstatement, but it was an exciting moment. Each of my 730 QSOs from Dhaka as S21U was monitored. I have a great deal of affection for my friends at both T&T and NBA who helped make everything possible. It had not been easy for any of them, and I appreciated their difficulties and the stand they had taken.

With some 730 QSOs, all on SSB and all on 15 or 10m, I don't think that much impression was made on the many DXers who needed Bangladesh for DXCC. Several of the many onlookers were surprised at the number of areas which I worked from Dhaka with apparent ease. The monitoring arrangement was a great success with plenty of local participation.

Many said hello to some Amateur Radio voice from Australia, Japan, and other countries. Several spoke to Kirsti on Norfolk Island and gave their names, talked about the weather, and often asked her a question. The officials around me were also impressed, and I felt that all were happy that Bangladesh was the centre of international attention. Often, the incoming signals were quite outstanding, and as the various countries were contacted, they were soon found on a map I had pinned up over the operating position. I tried to make all more aware that Amateur Radio was a hobby, good fun, and that it involved people from all walks of life. The behaviour of the hams I worked was a credit to the Amateur Radio community.

My letter, mentioned earlier, had requested permission from the 25th March until the 5th April. Circumstances beyond everyone's control had made the finalising of my permission late; I operated 3 days only, on the 3rd, 4th and 5th April. After all the problems, I was reluctant to attempt to try to arrange an extension of the dates. Also, my time was now limited, as I needed to be back on Norfolk Island to finalise arrangements for a trip, accompanied by Kirsti, back to A51, Bhutan. Around 10 am local time, on Friday the 5th April, I reluctantly closed S21U down, returned all the equipment, undid my power supply fix (now you may look), and had soon tidied everything up. There were several 'thank you' words to say, and it was all over.

I organised a photocopy of my S21U log at the hotel, and passed it over to T&T. A few hours later, I was at the airport, ready to start my trip back home via Bangkok and Sydney. My short operation as S21U from Bangladesh was at an end.

I had made arrangements with T&T to return to Dhaka on the 17th May on our return back from Bhutan; Kirsti would have continued on to Norfolk Island. Once again, Bangladesh, that unluckiest of countries, suffered a mind boggling natural disaster in the nature of a major flood. One small side effect was that Druk Air suspended its service to Dhaka from Bhutan as there was a fuel supply problem in Dhaka. As a result, the plane with Kirsti and me over-flew Dhaka and duly arrived in Bangkok.

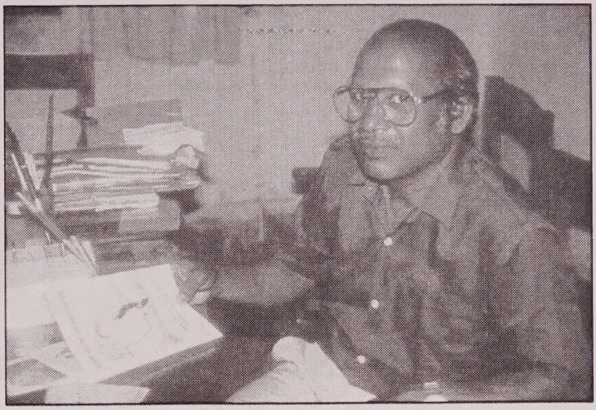
I mailed a copy of the documentation for my operation as S2lU by registered Air Mail to ARRL HQ, attention DXCC Desk, before leaving Dhaka. I received prompt, written confirmation from DXCC ARRL that the documentation for my operation as S21U was accepted by DXCC.

With the present democratic climate, and with the T&T

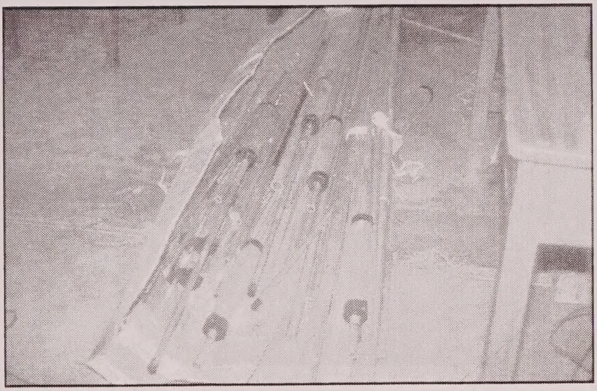
Board having resumed its responsibilities for areas of communications and of all frequency management matters, things were now on the move. A 15 member T&T Wireless Board, under The Chairman and board members of T&T, now met on a regular basis. At these meetings, all aspects of communications in Bangladesh were discussed. I was fortunate to meet many members of this board during my stay in Dhaka.

A few days after my return home, HIDXA wrote a letter of thanks on an individual basis to the Chairman and members of the T&T board. In addition, each received some background material on the Amateur Radio Service and a request to discuss the hobby. There was now a genuine interest in making a start to introducing the hobby in the country. At a meeting held in August, the Amateur Radio Service was on the agenda. Strong support was voiced from several of the board members. One thing was certain; monitoring continued to be a difficult area to resolve. Some members felt that this had to be a basic condition for any possible of activity on the Amateur Radio bands.

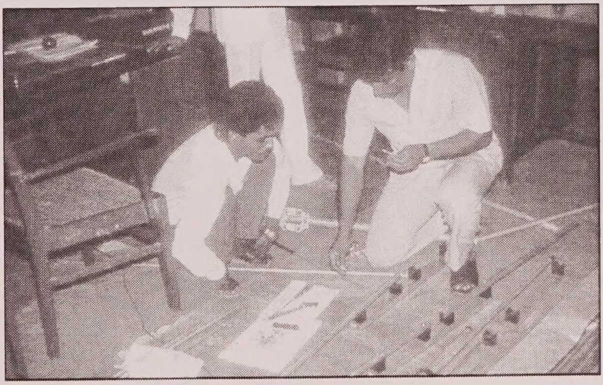
I am grateful to the many officials of the MIO, T&T, and the NBA for their help, courtesy and consideration. It was nice to be able to meet them all in person, having been in touch with many of them for several months. Since my return to Norfolk Island, this personal contact with T&T was helpful in furthering the possible introduction of the hobby in Bangladesh.



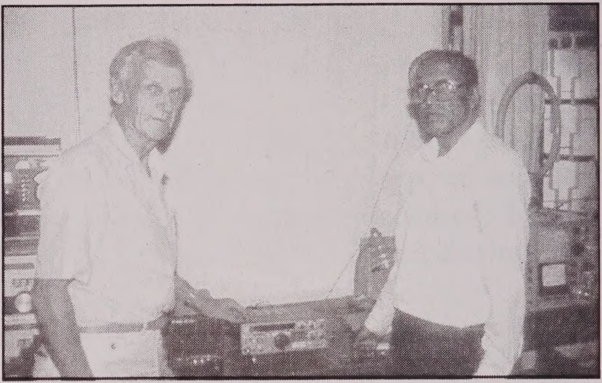
S21U operation, reading the latest HIDXA newsletter.



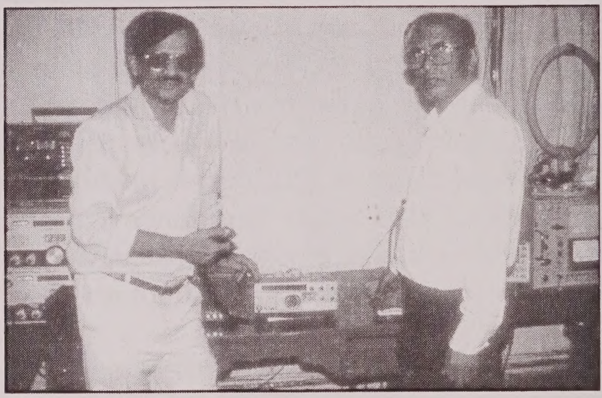
It was hard to resolve the beam parts problem.



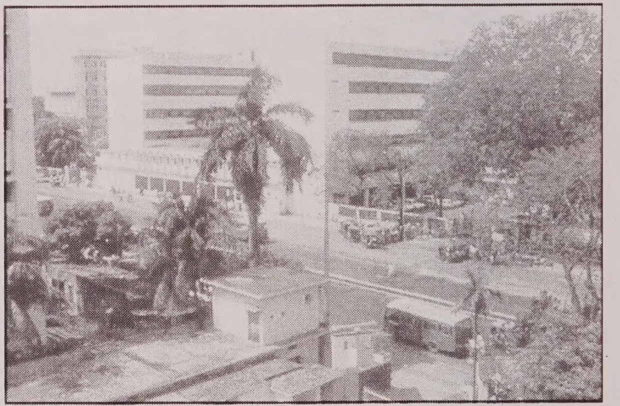
Trying to find parts to put a working beam together.



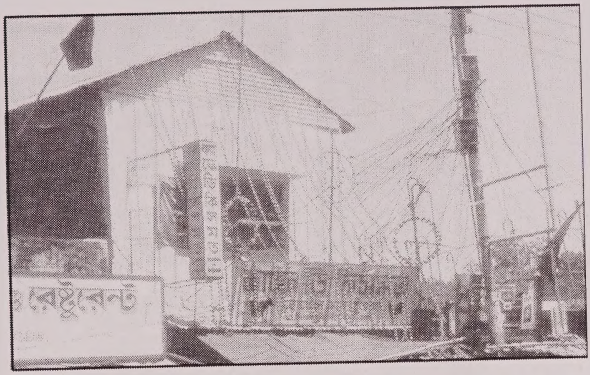
S21U operation, Chowdra of BTTB checks the rig.



Said with the rig I used for my S21U operation.

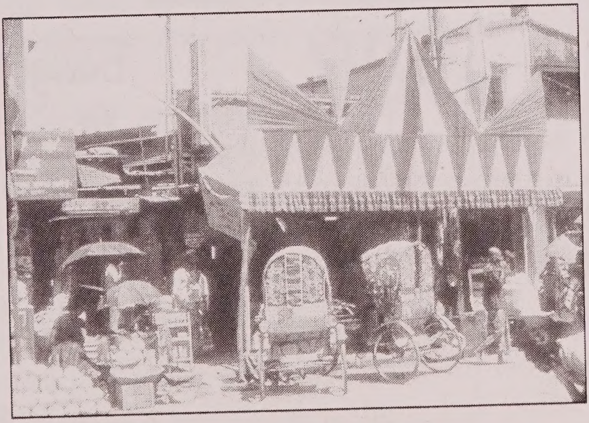


View from the roof of the PTT building.



Telephone distribution system, the Dhaka area.

Outskirts of Dhaka, a roadside 'trinket' stall.



Roadside shops just outside Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Musical entertainment at the Sheraton Hotel.

One of the many ferry crossings in Bangladesh.

S21U
Bangladesh
ZONE 22
J. B. SMITH
DHAKA
BANGLADESH

S21U QSL card used for my operation from Dhaka.

Chapter 24

RETURN TO BANGALDESH

S21ZA. 5 August – 13 August 1992.

I received the telex from BTTB, Dhaka, dated the 23 July 1992, on Norfolk Island early on the morning of the 24th. The telex was addressed to J.B. Smith, Norfolk Island, and the Subject, "Introduction of the Amateur Radio Service in Bangladesh", and it immediately caught my attention. The opening lines were significant: *BTTB is pleased to inform you that the Govt. of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh has approved the Amateur Radio Service in Bangladesh. You are requested to FAX the following documents for having (sic) a license in Bangladesh.*

We had now been down this track for over two and a half years, when suddenly, Amateur Radio had officially arrived in Bangladesh. My interest had started in a simple enough way. As a DXer, Bangladesh was needed by many, but the country did not permit Amateur Radio. Was there anything to be done to change the situation?

With that telex I felt a great happiness and, frankly, amazement at how hard everyone had worked to get everything in place. I have nothing but praise for the Director of this new Agency within the BTTB.

I replied immediately to the telex with my congratulations to all concerned, also stating that I would be in Dhaka as soon as possible, subject to arranging the visa requirements and scheduling flights to and from Norfolk Island.

Any assistance, real or imagined, which I had extended to Bangladesh, had been given to people that I regarded as friends. The results reflected the tremendous effort of the staff of BTTB and their application to the idea of the Amateur Radio service. In many cases, my input was easy; the project started from scratch.

On arrival in Dhaka, the formalities for the issue of the first Amateur Radio licenses involving a foreigner were soon completed. There remained the task of paying for the license which was based on existing government arrangements for the licensing of fixed stations in Bangladesh. The BTTB account rendered to me included a charge for the callsign, and a charge for the Equipment License (the license itself authorises the equipment being used). The significance of the Z in my callsign S21ZA was that it indicated that it had been issued to a foreigner. The total cost of US $100.00 was not cheap for a seven-day license, but once issued, the license was readily renewable for any future visit.

The actual payment of the license fee was an education in itself. I was already an old hand in these bureaucratic style areas; nevertheless, without the assistance of BTTB, it would have taken me one full day to complete the payment. With my receipt in hand, I headed back to BTTB where my license could now be completed and the callsign of S21ZA issued.

For the visiting foreigner, the license is valid for 7 days, and this was based on input, given by local amateurs, at a meeting with BTTB in November. The input was aimed at limiting extended operation by visiting foreigners making thousands of QSOs during their stay!! My view, expressed at the time, was that the visitor license should be valid for the length of the visa. A visitor was then able to get a 15 day visa with little formality, and an extension of visa of a week is straightforward. In the case of the foreigner working in the country, my recommendation had been that the Amateur Radio license should be valid for as long as the work permit visa was valid.

The license document was a small 18 page booklet and I was disappointed to learn that the proper AR License was still not in place. My license followed the practise used for existing BTTB documentation for fixed and land mobile stations. I think that this license is a collector's item in its sense of importance in Amateur Radio terms. The document was headed 'Amateur Radio License' and, written into the pages, was the language of permission.

The license stated the address where the station is to be located. I gave a private location in Dhaka as my station address and it was accepted by BTTB without question. This clearly demonstrated the confidence of BTTB that Amateur Radio matters were under control.

After moving out from the Sheraton Hotel, where I had spent two nights, I soon had all my radio equipment in place at my planned location; travel in Dhaka is always full of surprises and thrills, not for the weak in heart. I made a start to the setting up the S21ZA station at its official private location.

For the station location I was fortunate in that Andrew Flint (now S21ZD) was well known in Dhaka, and with his assistance I was able to rent a part office to set up my station. It had a permanent security guard on site, and I was able to come and go as I pleased. For accommodation, I had taken a rooming arrangement nearby, and although it was hardly the Sheraton it was adequate for my needs. I did have a problem of food, but this was not insurmountable. With some care, by choosing the cafes where I ate, I would stay alive! Been there, done that, on many occasions and locations!

On the flat rooftop of the office area, I unpacked my Butternut HF6V vertical. The outside temperature was 30 C, and my mind turned back to the events of November the previous year. There, on a roof a few hundred metres away, Kirsti and I had unpacked and installed the same antenna, confident that we would be active the next day; on that occasion we were both disappointed.

I set about getting my modified HF6V vertical ready for use. Is easily assembled by one person, and can be up and ready for operation within 30 minutes. Shortly afterwards, I ran the coaxial cable down from the roof into the ground floor office window, and it was now available at the operating position.

In the corner of the office which had been allocated for my use, a small writing desk had been set up, and I made a start to unpacking my gear. The basic station was quickly connected together. I had to make a quick trip to a local electrical shop to purchase 10 metres of three core power cable to reach the nearest office power point. Twenty dollars poorer I returned, and connected up the station equipment, and switched on. The receiver sounded fine, and, as I tuned around, I heard a loud VU station, in New Delhi, working on 20m SSB. As I moved the rig back a few inches, everything went dead. Dial lights were still on, but silence reigned. My heart sank. I bounced the rig, hit the sides; the rig remained stubbornly 'dead'.

I removed the top and bottom covers of the ICOM 751 and went through the routine of checking plugs and sockets. From the top everything seemed to be okay but, on turning over the rig and continuing the checking routine, I found that when I touched a small coax connector with a plug-in lead, the receiver sprang back to life. Meanwhile, the VU station had gone, unaware of the drama at S21ZA. Hallelujah! With the mini coax plug now re-seated in its socket, and completion of the checking routine, the rig was soon back together and in place. I heaved a sigh of relief.

My license was valid for 7 days, and during this time I operated on all the HF bands. A couple of days after I started operating, I ran into Rudi, S21ZC, on 20m CW. I thought it was Eric, WZ6C, as S21ZB had been reserved for Kirsti, who due to unforeseen circumstances had been unable to accompany me. But after listening for a few minutes, the operator was giving his name as Rudi. A day or so later, Rudi, DK7PE, and I met, and we had several interesting chats over the future of Amateur Radio in Bangladesh. Rudi was set up at the Sheraton Hotel (my old stomping ground), and with his low band activity he had certainly taken a lot of weight off my shoulders. Rudi also came over to visit the S21ZA shack, and we took many photographs.

On the second day I had some more equipment problems, this time involving the ICOM AT500 auto antenna tuner. It had become erratic in operation, and, during a quiet spell, I decided to take a look, and took the cover off. A few minutes later the problem was located; the drive coupling on one of the variable tuning capacitors was loose. I had no Allen key or anything that I might use to tighten the set screw. I was, however, able to remove the offending screw, and I headed out into the outside world. My idea was to show it to a few people and try to get a key to fit. I ended up at a small road side stall of a locksmith. By signs, I asked if he was able to help, and a few minutes later he had a solution. This is what he did. He took a short length of old bicycle spoke from among the several pieces in his junk box) and, with a hammer and his small anvil, he shaped one end to fit inside the set screw. He bent the other end into a small loop which could then be held firmly. For about 50 cents it seemed that I might have a fix to that AT500 coupler. The device worked perfectly, and I was able to tighten up the set screw so that the tuning control worked properly.

Band conditions were poor for a couple of days, and in this situation the 7-day license began to look fragile. I had a few exciting openings to East and West coast USA, but did not make many QSOs in those areas. Of course, Europe and Japan usually had good propagation and, at the end of it all, with some 6,500 QSOs in the log, I felt reasonably happy. After all, it was not the normal-style DXpedition, with nobody active in the country after the DXpeditioners up stakes and leave. With Amateur Radio a reality in the country and a couple of nationals in place, the demand for Bangladesh would easily be met.

One other area requires comment. It is a requirement of the license conditions that a copy of the log is given to BTTB on completion of the operation. In my case, I opted for each page logging 60 QSOs, date, time, frequency, and callsign. With a piece of carbon paper and another log sheet underneath, I numbered each page, and prepared them in batches of 6 pairs, held together with a paper clip. The system worked fine, but it was sometimes a nuisance to stop operating to make up another six batches. I clipped these carbon copies in a file cover, and gave this to BTTB. I have an identical file cover here on Norfolk Island with the original log.

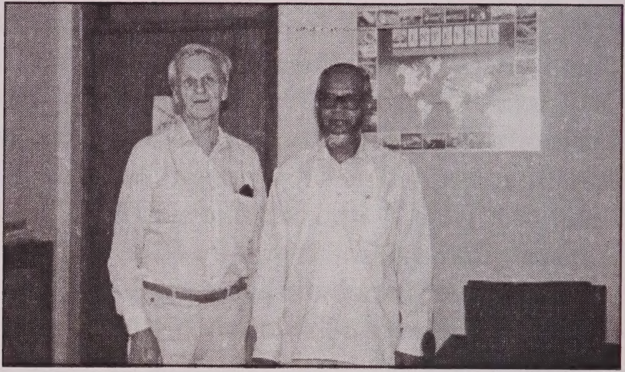
I have many pleasant memories of my stay, in part due to having confidence to look around, knowing my way in Dhaka. That first arrival in Bangladesh is a daunting experience. It is busy and even worrying if you are not used to the high activity. These days I feel an 'old hand' and I enjoy Dhaka - maybe coming from the quietness of Norfolk Island has something to do with it. There is so much to see, and life around one is busy, turning every corner into a surprise.

The happiness and sincerity over the issue of the S21ZA license was obvious. BTTB were finally able to prepare this Amateur Radio License as the document of authority for Amateur Radio activity in Bangladesh. There was genuine disappointment, within BTTB, that Kirsti was not with me. The invitation was extended to her once again, asking her to visit Bangladesh and operate Amateur Radio as S21ZB.

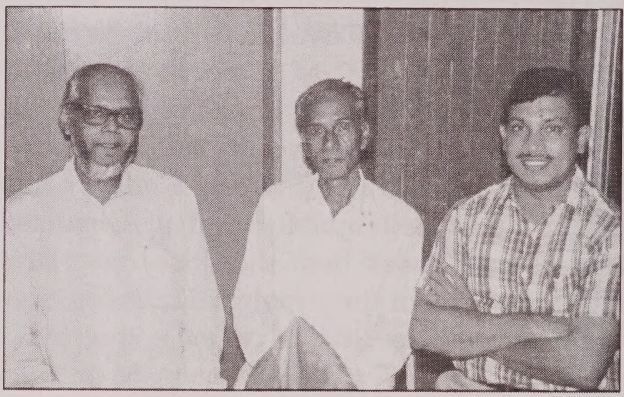
I will never forget the personal kindness of Muhammad Ismail of Frequency Management, who came to the S21ZA shack to wish Kirsti a Happy Birthday by means of Amateur Radio. Similarly, the get-together at S21ZA with a small group of Bangladeshi nationals interested in Amateur Radio was a wonderful way to end another successful operation. We were all secure in the idea that they, too, would soon be active on the Amateur Radio bands.

Equipment: Transceiver ICOM IC 751, Linear ICOM IC 2KL, Antenna Tuner, AT500, HF6V Multi-band Vertical, Laptop with RTTY software.

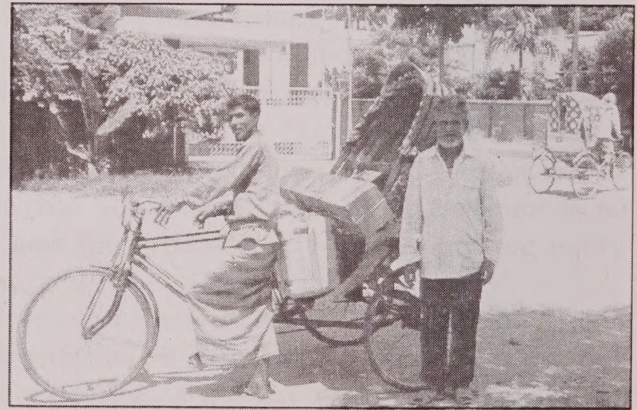
My thanks go to many people, but, I must not forget the members of the BTTB Board and, especially the Director of Frequency International, Mr. Fazlur Rahman. Neither can I forget the assistance provided by Muhammad Ismail of Frequency Management. It was their day; they were the ‘true believers’ in the merits of the Amateur Radio Service, in every sense of the words.



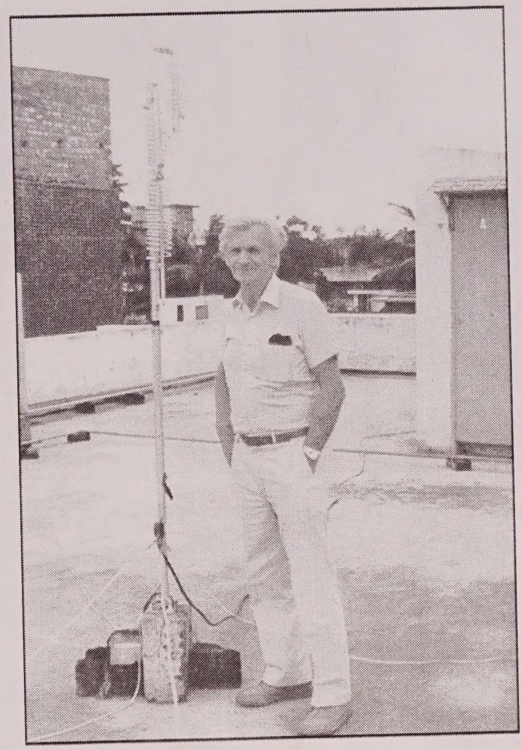
Frequency Management office, Jim and Mohammed.



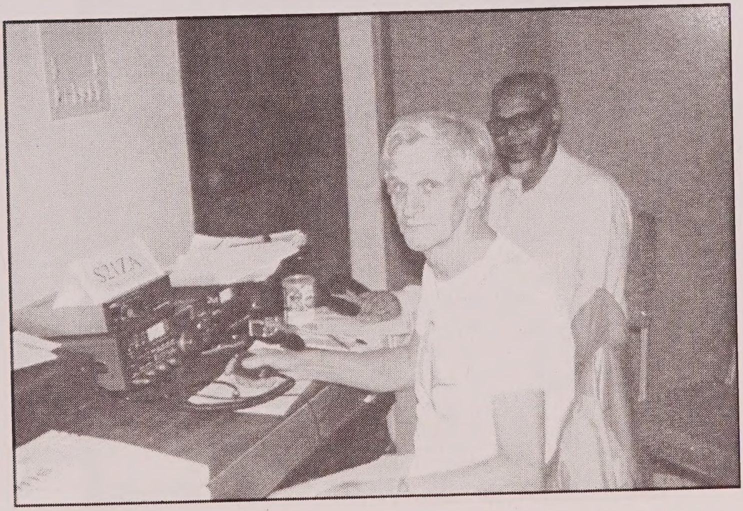
Frequency Management licensing office.



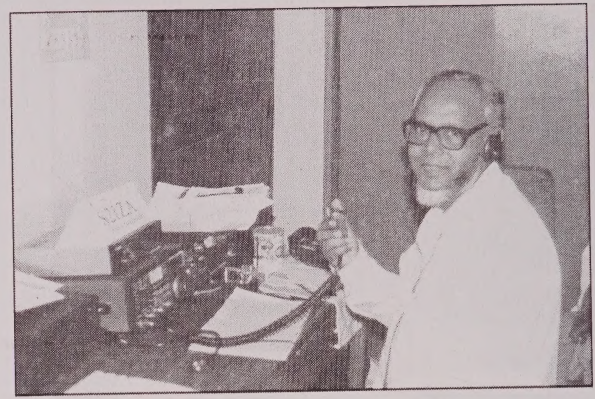
S21ZA rig, excellent rickshaw taxi service, Dhaka.



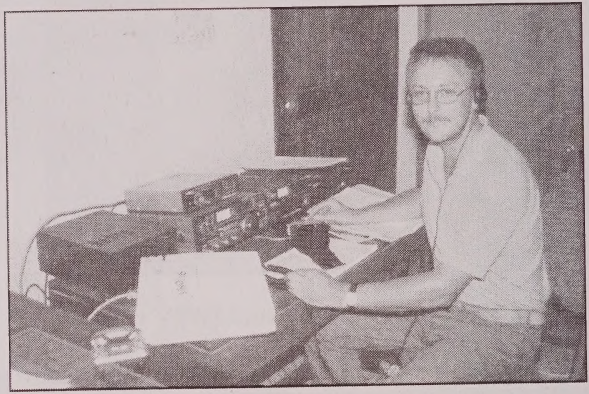
S21ZA, my trusty multi-band HF6V vertical.



Jim, Operating S21ZA, Mohammed in the background.



Mohammed in QSO with Kirsti, VK9NL.



Rudi operating my S21ZA station, Dhaka.

Jim and S21ZA station shortly after setting up.

S21ZA
Dhaka, Bangladesh

S21ZA station set up for first RTTY operation.

J.B.SMITH
BANANI
DHAKA,
BANGLADESH
S21ZA
BANGLADESH
ITU ZONE 41
CQ ZONE 22
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION

S21ZA QSL card used for my Dhaka operation.

Chapter 25

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

DXpedition to Willis Island, 2 October-18 October 1992.
VK9WW and VK9NL/W.

The DXpedition to Willis Island in October 1992 almost did not happen. Originally, the HIDXA plans were for a DXpedition to Mellish Reef, using a chartered vessel as a means of transport. We only intended to call in at Willis Island for a couple of days, subject to permission being given.

As things turned out, we decided to try only for Willis Island, and a start was made on this project. Willis Island is a tiny spot of Australia, lying some 300 miles from Cairns on the north-west coast of Queensland. It has a basic role of being a weather station under the jurisdiction of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology. The Island is manned on a continuous basis, on a rotating six month stint, by a small team. The station gathers weather data on a daily basis, thus supplying valuable information to the mainland. It surprised me when I discovered that Willis Island has a long history in meteorology, stretching back to the early 1920s. In those earlier days, the Island was often manned by just a couple of weather station staff; it must have been a lonely existence.

On making application to the Queensland Regional Office of the Bureau of Meteorology, permission to visit the Island for a period of 7 days was granted to our small party of three. They knew of HIDXA, since we had rendered a service for their HQ in Melbourne. This had involved changing their existing weather station on Heard Island and replacing it with a newer version of the equipment. Our small group would almost double the population of Willis Island overnight.

With this important permission in place, we made a move to firm up our plans. When HIDXA first started on the Mellish/Willis Island trail, Bill, VK4CRR, had carried out some work. At one time he had thought about the possibility of flying to Mellish Reef, but it was felt that the distance there and back was too great. In any case, the idea was scrapped due to the total flying distance over open water. The necessary CAA dispensation would not be given for a single-engine float plane to Mellish Reef.

It was this idea which I followed up later as a possibility for Willis Island, since it is much closer to the mainland. This might be a good time to let you, the reader, know that Willis Island is mere 12 acres of real estate, and a few metres above sea level. It has neither an air strip, nor a runway.

My contact point in Queensland had also done some leg-work for HIDXA. He came up with the possibility of a freelance pilot who owned a 'twin engine' Grumman *Super Widgeon* amphibious float-plane (yes, I realise that is going back some time!). What sealed the idea was that the pilot was available for a charter, and CAA clearance was possible for this aircraft. The Grumman *Super Widgeon* is a relic of the late 1940s, and I use the word relic in the kindest possible way. 'Coral Wings', with registration VH-WET (very appropriate) proved to be ideal for our plans.

I made application to DOTC Licensing for Willis Island and, shortly after, with the VK9WW license issued, agreement on the charter costs for the plane, clearance for the flight there and back, and final clearance from the Bureau of Meteorology, things began to move. There was to be a false start, as John the pilot would not be available for the original dates planned. However, shortly after, a new date was firmed up; the 12th October. The actual departure was subject to weather conditions, but things looked good. The three members of the group became Atsu, VK2BEX; Kirsti, VK9NL; and myself. Our personal total weight was 210 kg and this was an important starting statistic.

Weight became an all important part of our plans. The plane had no means of re-fuelling at Willis Island, and so the pilot carried some additional fuel in jerry cans as a top-up measure. As a result, we had a severe weight restriction. Atsu and I had many telephone discussions and fax exchanges over equipment and the relative weight of items. We decided on three complete HF stations: one barefoot IC 751, one IC 750, and one IC 751 with an ICOM 500 watt solid-state linear, plus one 6m Rig with a 60 watt linear. The antennas were two multiband verticals, a Cushcraft R5 and Butternut HF6V, plus a 5 element beam for 6m. RTTY operation was to be by means of a laptop computer and terminal unit. In addition, microphones, keys, and many metres of coaxial cable, wire all had to be carried. All these items ate slowly into our weight limitation. I know Atsu and I weighed and re-weighed rigs on several occasions. Great care was taken to avoid any unnecessary items. Atsu went on a diet losing over 5 kg in a couple of weeks and, as a result of this sacrifice, we were able to take log books along!!

We arranged to meet in Cairns, our departure point, on Sunday the 11th October. It did not give us much spare time, but we felt that it would be long enough for our shopping requirements, and shops were open on Sunday. Atsu brought all his equipment into our hotel room, and a further check was made on weight. It was still very tight in the weight department, but we were being extremely careful. I telephoned the pilot, and we discussed our problems and plan of action prior to leaving.

As a result of our discussion, John indicated that he could have a Customs officer available to clear our equipment almost immediately. Our equipment could be loaded in the parking area as distinct from the area used after we had gone through air port clearance. If he could arrange it with Customs, we would be able to load the plane right away.

John came over with an accurate weighing device known as 'bathroom scales', and we made a start. With the now easy loading of the plane in mind, it was apparent that there was much saving to be made in shedding outer wrappings. One example was discarding the suitcase that held the ICOM 751 - 5 kg when empty. Those items from suitcases and boxes were wrapped up separately; for example, that ICOM 751 was wrapped in a towel.

Our equipment, etc., now formed a heap to one side of the room. J John kept a running tally on these weights. He added the weight (those bathroom scales again) of the three passengers, and add our personal contribution to the final total. He was happy, and suddenly we were home and dry over the weight problem. I believe that during that session, we were able to shed over 40kg of surplus weight. We drove to the airport with all our items, and an hour later, after a Customs check, everything was on board *'Coral Wings'* ready for departure the next morning. We heaved a sigh of relief; it was time to relax.

The three of us returned to the hotel room which looked as though a bomb had hit the place. We soon tidied the room up, and the hotel agreed to store our suitcases and the unwanted packaging ready for our return.

We met up with Harry, VK2BJL, and later VK2RQ and his wife Mary. Harry and I were old friends, as we had been to Tokelau on a DXpedition in 1982. They took good care of us in Cairns, and we shared a pleasant evening in a local club. Harry arranged to pick us up next morning and take us to the airport. We still had much shopping to do but the list was much shorter.

Sure enough, Harry was at the hotel bright and early next morning, and we headed for the airport with a stop at the supermarket. Every item purchased was weighed by the checkout girl. Now, with the weight saved from the efforts of Sunday, our shopping became straightforward, and, with a couple of minor exceptions, we managed to get everything required. We did make a couple of sacrifices at the checkout counter; for example 5 kg of bananas instead of the 12 kg previously planned. Since the plane would be flying empty to pick us up, we had made arrangements to have the pilot bring several things to Willis Island on that leg. These goodies would be for the four 'inhabitants'!

Our departure point was the international terminal at Cairns, since we had to clear Australian Customs. This clearance was straightforward, and we were carrying almost 60 kg of hand luggage, including those food items purchased at the supermarket. '*Coral Wings*' looked tiny; standing parked a few metres away from a Qantas 747 jumbo jet. Our flight was listed on the departure board, together with flights to Singapore, Tokyo and other destinations. We finished our final loading and boarded the plane. The Grumman 'Super Widgeon', being amphibious, is fitted with an undercarriage, and soon we were taxiing, ready for a runway take-off. It was about 10.30 in the morning, and we were running about one hour later than planned. Not bad!

After take-off, we flew over Cairns which took a few minutes, and then we were heading out to sea, climbing at a steady rate, turning on course for Willis Island two hours flying time away. We soon reached our cruising height of 2,000 m and, flying 'jump seat', I was reminded of Papua New Guinea. In those days I had flown thousands of kms in small aircraft. None of us have any doubt that we 'flew' to Willis Island and back again. Our very intimate contact with this plane for every inch of the way remains with us; we flew by the seat of our pants. Flying many miles over open water in any small plane is a sobering experience - nothing at all like those jumbo jet flights.

With a satellite navigator on board (a recent purchase by the John, the owner/pilot), Willis Island was easy to find. John later made an interesting comment, saying that the Island was about two miles 'off course' on current charts. If correct, this was an interesting discrepancy, especially if arriving by sea.

As we started our descent to Willis Island, the sea had started to roughen up. Until this point it had looked smooth and calm. Willis Island lying ahead looked tiny, easy to miss, and those first impressions are lasting. We were now on approach for landing, and the sea swell appeared to be heavy. The landing was in fact bumpy, but after three hefty bounces, lots of water on the windscreen and presumably elsewhere, we were taxiing towards shore. Kirsti reckons that on landing, she did not have time to scream!!!

The welcoming party of the current four Island residents was on the beach to meet us. They gradually became life-size as we taxied through the opening in the reef. Incidentally, taxiing with the undercarriage 'down' is the preferred method; it is better to hit a reef with the wheels than the hull. "Good thinking", I thought, and John was able to put '*Coral Wings*' right up onto the beach. He wanted a fast turn-around before the weather got any rougher. We all had a mad scramble to get everything off the plane and heaped on the white beach. As we unloaded, we all made a hurried introduction to each other. John, the pilot, topped up his tanks from those jerry cans he carried, and, before long, he was ready to be on his way. At the end of his take-off run (would it ever get unstuck?) John eased the plane off the very rough sea surface. Soon '*Coral Wings*' circled the Island, and set course for Cairns. It had all taken a few minutes and, standing on the beach, we all looked at each other. Willis Island, we have arrived! By the time we had moved everything off the beach and up to the base area, it was quite windy. In fact, a couple of hours later, a landing would have been impossible, and this gusty weather was around for several days. Lady Luck had smiled!

John, the OIC, suggested that we set up our stations in the workshop area, and this was welcomed by the three of us. We all got busy, and a couple of hours later the two HF rigs were set up. I assembled the two verticals and then connected them to the rigs inside. Within a couple of hours of arrival, VK9WW and Kirsti, VK9NL/portable Willis were up and running. Many things still had to be done: 6m antenna and wire antennas had to be completed but we were active. The Amateur Radio grapevine would soon spread the word, "VK9WW, Willis Island is on the Air".

With all DXpeditions, once they are up and running, things become hazy. It becomes a battle of one's own stamina against the endless pile-ups, and things move along with another antenna organised, and other bands available. On the first day, we had an early opening on 6m which was followed by a couple of days of complete silence on that band. On a suspicion that things were not okay, the antenna was brought down. I examined this brand new antenna and found a faulty connection in the gamma match. I fixed this, and at last we were now confident that if the 6m band opened again, we would know! Atsu chipped away at the pile-ups, and VK9WW also became available on RTTY. Meanwhile, Kirsti and I shared the other station, each operating as long as we could then change over. It became days of operating, catching a few hours sleep, swapping of operators. It all worked out well.

The workshop operating area was noisy, but since it was due to the air conditioning, it was a real bonus for us, allowing us to operate with little real fatigue. The QSO totals crept up, after a few days we knew that the DXpedition was beginning to look okay. You know what they say? "Never count one's chickens". "Don't get overconfident". Sure enough, the ICOM 75O quit. No transmit on any band, nor any mode. It took me some time to get to the problem, which turned out to be just that same loose mini coax connector experienced in Dhaka, and once fixed we were back on the air. Murphy had been defeated once again.

To avoid possible interference problems, we shut down during the daily morning weather observations which started with the launching of the weather balloon. As it headed for the atmosphere it would be tracked by radar until it burst.

This stop gave us a chance to watch a strange ritual. We had been told about this daily occurrence which happened when the Met balloon went up. (Now there is a well know expression for you to mull over!) The balloon was filled with gas and walked over to the tracking area. As soon as the balloon was released it would be tracked all the way up and measurements recorded.

Nothing prepared us for what happened next. The balloon was released, and thousands of birds took to the sky. I don't think it fair to say they were frightened of the balloon. But, for some reason or another, its movement caused them great anxiety or maybe it was excitement. We were to observe this screeching mob on a day to day basis as they wheeled around above us. Afterwards, we would get the okay that Met activities were finished for the moment, and it would be back to the pile-up.

As time and band conditions permitted, each of us in turn toured the small Island looking at the countless sea birds which call Willis Island home. We all have our share of close up bird photographs of boobies, frigate birds and terns. We also saw signs on the beach of turtles having come ashore, and, on one occasion, one was swimming a few metres off shore. It looked huge.

We also began to learn more about our hosts, and in joining them once a day for a meal we at least kept in touch. As things turned out, propagation was not too bad, and we almost always had a band open. Our operation became a round the clock affair, only closing after all the bands quit for the day. We had many good openings to all areas during our stay. Those small islands with their nearby salt water ground plane are amazing in their assistance to propagation.

The small meteorology group on Willis Island had good facilities for their living and recreation time, with a well stocked library. Also, in these days of satellite TV, the Island is not as isolated as in days gone by. The members of the Met group were hospitable, and, I suppose, our arrival brought some measure of change to the normal daily routines. During one of the morning sessions a VK station called me and mentioned that he had been on Willis Island many years ago. In asking his name, I asked him to hang on. I quickly checked the Roll Board which carries the year and names of all previous staff members. Sure enough, his name was there, and also in the same year was the name of the present OIC. A few minutes were taken from the pile-up, whilst they both caught up with life since they had last worked together on Willis Island.

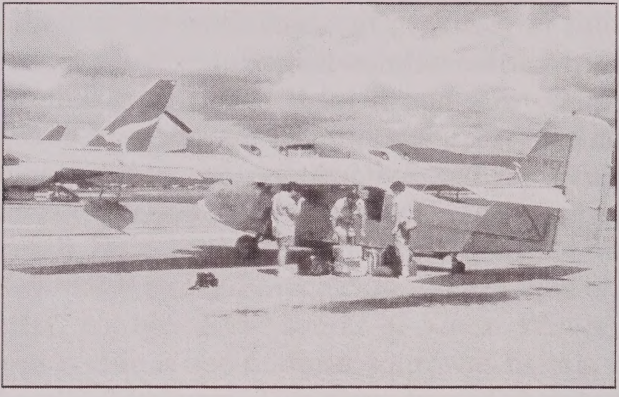
It was now time to prepare to leave. We were to be picked up at about 0900 on Monday morning, and by that time we would have spent almost 7 days on Willis Island. With some 18,000 QSOs in our collective logs, the DXpedition had gone well. Starting very early in the morning, we gradually prepared for pick up, taking down antennas, rolling up coaxial cable. About one hour prior to our projected pick up we closed down, and the stations of VK9WW and VK9NL/W went silent. As we all set to and tidied up the workshop, our packing was finished, we were left with those moments after all DXpeditions -- the beginning of the switch off, a return to normality. That relaxed feeling, which comes about in the knowledge that things have gone well, and one begins to wind down.

Soon all our gear, all nicely gift wrapped, was on the beach once again. Had it been a whole week since we arrived? It seemed much closer to a couple of hours! A little later, we heard the sound of 'Coral Wings' approaching, and within a few minutes, John was taxiing up against the beach once again. This time, free of weight restrictions of passengers, John had brought many 'goodies' for the group, courtesy of HIDXA The plane was unloaded quickly, and John, standing on the wings, completed his fuel-tank topping up exercise from his on board jerry- cans.

We soon had all our gear on board, and with a final cheerio to our hosts, we boarded the plane. We were on our way. This time the weather was glorious and the take-off easy. An hour later, after the taxi out and the run up for take-off, John set course for Cairns. Once again, we were in the air, looking down at Willis Island receding in the distance. This time we knew every bit of the Island, and, as we got higher, we saw the other Islands of the Willis Group in the distance. They are not visible from Willis Island, as they lie just over the horizon.

The two hour trip back to Cairns was uneventful, and a few minutes later we were on approach to Cairns airport, ready for landing. After landing, John soon had customs clearance for us, and we proceeded direct to the 'small aircraft' terminal. This meant easy unloading, and before long I was telephoning for a taxi. After saying goodbye, and a big thanks to John, we headed back to the hotel and checked-in. The HIDXA, DXpedition to Willis Island had finished, and, in the spirit of all true DXpeditioners, a couple of hours later, Atsu had already started to enter his part of the VK9WW log into his computer log. This is called dedication.

Our QSL card carries acknowledgements and sincere thanks to the many that had helped make this operation successful. Thanks to Atsu, who proved himself to be a real asset, and to Kirsti, for her dedication to the exercise, and for her activity giving many DXers a new YL country.



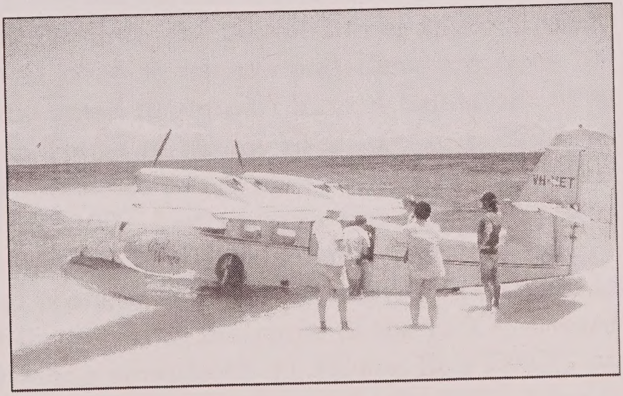
John (pilot) loading the Grumman Widgeon.

Almost over-head Willis Island on final approach.

Jet over-flies Willis Island during the VK9WW op.

Kirsti operating as VK9NL/ VK9W on Willis Island.

Nesting birds in their hundreds, Willis Island.



Almost finished loading VH-WET for return to Cairns.

Chapter 26

PULE'ANGA (The KINGDOM OF TONGA)

The Friendly Islands, A35MR, A35MR/P, February 1994

The Kingdom of Tonga covers a large area of the Pacific with four main groups of islands; Tongatapu, Nomuka, Ha'apai and Vava'u. They all lie in a north-south orientation. Western Samoa (now Samoa) is in the northern area and, to the east, some 400 miles away, lay the Fiji island group.

Tonga's International Airport is on Nuku'alofa, in the Tongatapu group, and is almost 3219 kms (2,000 miles) from Sydney. There are regular flights from both there and Auckland, New Zealand. The population of approximately 120,000 is spread over 36 islands and there are over 100 other islands too small to support human habitation. The highest point in Tonga is Mount Kao, 1039 m (3,379 feet) a.s.l. Nearby, a few miles to the west, is the island of Tofua which is 305 m (1000 feet) lower. The reason for this geography lesson will be revealed in later pages!

Over several years, I hade been on many DXpeditions to many parts of the world in the name of the DXCC Award programme. Having completed #1 Honor Roll DXCC on CW and SSB, I had become interested in the RSGB Islands on the Air programme (IOTA). DXers will know that A35, Tonga, is not a rare country as there are always a couple of stations active. In terms of the IOTA programme, however one of the Tonga Island Listings had never been activated, and this was of interest to the IOTA Chasers. IOTA has a huge plus in that an operator activating a 'new' island can claim credit for his or her IOTA award.

I spoke to Fr. Kevin, A35KB, (a member of HIDXA) on a regular basis and mentioned Niuatoputapu Island (the island name means 'very holy coconut'). Would it be possible to operate from there, and how would one get there? Kevin is also interested in IOTA; he is on Vava'u (OC-064) and is in constant demand. Kevin is a Catholic Priest, and he knew Niuatoputapu well; he had visited the island (and others) on a regular basis. It had no electric power; local groups depended on individual small petrol generators. Kevin was sure that the Catholic Mission on the Island had a generator, but he would check. He would be happy to accompany me if 'leave of absence' was to be granted, and I was all in favour of the idea. A couple of weeks later, I started to plan a visit to the Niuatoputapu Island, just like any DXpedition.

Niuatoputapu has a population of some 1,200 souls, and all of the main supplies for the Island arrive by sea; a small freighter service visits every few weeks, carrying fuel, food, and, of course, a few inter-island passengers.

There is a small grass airfield, and has a flight to and from Vava'u every couple of weeks. A small twin engine 'Otter' aircraft served the route, carrying a few passengers and limited baggage. Kevin reported that on these flight(s) the airline had a strict baggage limitation of 10 kg. In addition, there was a small carry-on hand luggage allowance. I rarely seemed to carry less than 90 kg on any normal mini-DXpedition, but with this news from Kevin, the idea of carrying a linear amplifier was ruled out. It became a matter of what minimum amount of equipment was needed for the operation?

Kevin soon confirmed the availability of a generator and that my permission to visit the Island was cleared. The Islanders had agreed to sell me 100 litres of fuel from their precious fuel stocks, and everything began to look good. I made arrangements with Kevin in several key areas. We decided that, with help of HIDXA, he would accompany me to Niuatoputapu. I felt that his years of experience in Tonga would be invaluable, and this proved to be true. Nevertheless, plans for our visit in November 1993 were brought to an abrupt halt. The freighter was running three weeks late, and the Islanders, as a result, were unable to spare any fuel. The solution for HIDXA was to arrange to have a 200 litre drum of fuel purchased and put aboard the freighter at Tongatapu.

Kevin knew, via the island Mission, that the freighter had arrived in December, and with Xmas and New Year out of the way, by early January I had made airline bookings to get me to Tongatapu. A few days later, I also had a confirmed internal flight return bookings for Kevin and myself for Niuatoputapu. We had a last minute scramble; Kevin had been unable to get final confirmation from the Catholic Mission that the fuel was indeed there and that a generator was available for our use. The third telegram to the Mission was, at last, answered with two days to spare. The fuel had in fact arrived in mid-December, and the drum was painted with JIM SMITH, NTI (Niuatoputapu Island)!! Fame at last! It now looked certain that the Island Hunters would shortly have a new IOTA Island to chase.

A few days later, I left Norfolk Island and was on my way to Tonga via Auckland, where I had an enforced weekend stop-over. The Kingdom of Tonga does not allow Sunday flights to the country. It was to be Monday evening before I arrived in Tongatapu, and on Tuesday morning I was on my way to Vava'u. I had to pay excess baggage, but otherwise had no problems.

Kevin met me at the airport, and I was soon settled in at the Catholic Mission. The plane was scheduled to depart for Niuatoputapu early on Friday morning, and over the next 2 days we checked all our resources. I had arrived completely self-sufficient, with a rig, AC power supply, my trusty HF6V Vertical antenna, power line extension cord, wire and coax cables.

Kevin was more limited in his choice of equipment, and he did not use an AC power supply for his rig. At the mission he used a 12 volt battery and charger: in Vava'u he planned to do the same, convinced that he would be able to borrow a battery from someone on the Island. He had packed his equipment, wire antennas, and his small charger for the battery as his base station rig power source.

Friday morning had us checking in at the airport; once again we had no problem with excess baggage. Kevin was familiar with almost everyone at the check-in area, and this certainly helped. All the worries over excess baggage were now behind us.

An hour later, the 'Twin Otter' touched down on the grass airstrip on Niuatoputapu Island, and we were met by Sione Laina, the Tongan Catholic priest. He was leaving the Island on the plane, but he was able to confirm that everything was in place for our stay. He apologised for the delay in clearing everything up by telegram and, after seeing him off, we were on our way. All our gear had been loaded on a large lorry, and, with a batch of other passengers, we set off, dropping people here and there on the way. My first impression of the Catholic Mission building was positive. We learned that we would each have a room to sleep in and there were individual shower and toilet facilities. This was much more than I ever expected.

At ground level, a large covered area was available for our use, ideal for setting up our stations. The freighter in December had brought a new 3 kva generator for the

Mission, and this had been installed in a small shed about 50m away. As a bonus, the generator output of 230V AC had been run underground to the Mission building, terminating in a three-pin power socket. Fluorescent lighting had also been installed in the covered area allocated for our rigs and our use. It seemed that we were now in business with much more than we had hoped for.

Within an hour, I had my station set up, using a Kenwood TS 690S which is fitted with a built in antenna tuner. I assembled and installed my Butternut HF6V vertical, and soon after I had the radial system in place. I was ready to go. My 20m length of power cable provided AC available near our rigs. I started up the generator, and, on 21260 (an IOTA Calling frequency,) informed the waiting 'chasers' that we had arrived and would be fully operational soon. ZL2VS, Dusty, was first in the A35MR/P log. I signed A35MR/P wishing to differentiate between any of my later A35MR operations.

Meanwhile, Kevin was in trouble as he needed a battery to power his rig. It took some time to locate one, which he borrowed and connected up. This battery problem was to be a source of irritation over the next couple of days. Kevin was unable to stay on the air for more than an hour before the battery was flat. The small charger he had carried on that trip was not capable of re-charging the battery. Of course, back in Vava'u his large capacity battery lay under the operating area, and the steady daily trickle charge was sufficient for all of his usual operating from the mission.

To overcome the problem, he shared my rig for a few days, but it was not a suitable arrangement. I decided to take a chance and connected his rig to my Kenwood PS 52, heavy duty AC Power Supply. We were lucky in that it was able to handle both rigs easily with a solid 13.8 V, and this is how we continued to operate.

We had some problems with interference between stations, but there was little to be done to fix this; proper grounding being a major problem. We both came to accept the situation as unfixable; at least, with some minor inconvenience, we were both able to operate. One other awkward situation arose in that we did not run the generator after about 2200 hours local time. This was a courtesy to the mission. It did not seem right to have the generator running when all others around us were trying to sleep.

After a few hours of operation, we had well over the minimum number of QSOs and number of countries worked for the Island to be given an IOTA number, and Roger, G3KMA (IOTA Director), allocated OC-191 to Niuatoputapu Island. This small Island of Tonga was now part of the IOTA programme. Kevin and I continued to operate and work as many of the Island chasers as possible.

In our activities on the Island, I must mention the generosity and the kindness of the Islanders we came in touch with. With Kevin known to many from his previous stay, and his fluency in Tongan, coupled with his unique knowledge of the Tongan people, the visit became special.

The children loved us. On their way to school they had to pass our door, and, as a bonus, it was the same story on their way home. They wondered what we were doing. With Kevin speaking into a microphone, that was not the problem, but what was I doing when I was sending Morse code? That had them baffled. With my daily SSB sked with Kirsti, VK9NL, on Norfolk Island, many of the children and people around said hello to her. Sister Loleta had a longish chat with Kirsti, asking about life on Norfolk Island, and she was amazed at the clarity of the speech signals.

With all DXpeditions, the time appears to pass in a blur. Fuelling the generator, eating, sleeping, and operating becomes a vicious cycle. Band conditions after the 5th February were terrible with hours of dead bands, and we fought for every QSO.

During our stay, many were chasing the DXpedition to Peter I Island, which contributed, in part, to our low QSO rates. One of the highlights was working that rare Peter I DXpedition, on both 20m and 40m SSB with 100 watts and the HF6V vertical. We worked many JA stations on several bands and we did have some excellent band openings.

Kevin showed me around the island, and he seemed to know everyone. We visited an area famous for its weaving of the reed mat used by most Pacific Islanders to sit on, eat their meals and to sleep upon. These traditional mats, on some Islands, carry a special significance by showing rank or status, but its main function is to provide a clean eating area, and, of course, a sleeping area. The wide-leafed reed is dried and prepared into wide strips, and these are then trimmed and folded to provide a thicker flat strip which is used to weave the mat. Weaving the map is labour intensive; the strips are only about one metre in length, requiring numerous splices to be made. I purchased one of the available mats, and it is still here on Norfolk, even today in good condition, some 12 years later.

All good things come to an end. The day of our departure drew near, but we were granted a one day extension, since the plane had to take part in a rescue mission to another Island, uplifting two sick people. The time had come to take the antennas down, get our equipment packed, and tidy up and, soon after, we were once again at the small airfield where it was time for goodbyes. With some 3,200 QSOs in my A35MR/P log, I was sure that many of the Island chasers had worked OC-191. Now, I also had a brand new IOTA Island to claim, a result of our activity.

Back in Vava'u, Kevin and I had time to tidy things up. Kevin got his home station up and running and he was soon ready to get back on the air. A couple of days later, I was once again travelling.

Ha'apai Group

Within easy reach of Vava'u, the Ha'apia group had a different IOTA number, OC169, and, in those days, was rare. On the island, tourist-style accommodation is available, and whilst in Vava'u, I had booked to stay at the Sandy Beach resort on Foa Island. The air-strip was at Pangaii on Lifuka Island and, an hour after saying goodbye to Kevin, I was on my way. We were soon landing at Pangai where I was met at the terminal and driven to Foa in the resort's vehicle. Foa Island is linked to Lifuka Island by means of a bridge. At the resort I completed the booking-in formalities and got organised in my accommodation. I had chosen this resort as the accommodation consisted of 12 separate Bungalow (Chalet) units. They were ideal, and I was able to operate as and when I liked, without troubling any other guests.

It did not take too long to get the station set up and running in the room. AC power was available in each chalet, and I had chosen this particular unit as it had a largish shrub nearby. This proved to be ideal to hold my vertical HF6V antenna in place; the bush proved to be an excellent support. With some local help (I have never been any good at climbing palm trees, and learned this fact on Car Nicobar), I soon had an inverted V antenna in place. I was ready to go on the air, and this time I would use A35MR. As mentioned previously, I had used the /P designator on Niuatongatapu to separate the two distinct IOTA, A35-related operations.

The resort was in a quiet location of the island and there were not many tourists around. The dining area and bar were clean, and the food turned out to be good. I became a regular at breakfast and other meals, and I was also able to arrange a snack for later in the evening. A couple of shops were within walking distance, and I bought soft drinks for those long A35MR evening operating sessions.

The beach area was nice and clean, and popular with the guests. One thing stood out when looking out to sea. In the distance was the pure cone-shaped Mount Kau and nearby Tofua. This was the renowned Tofua whose claim to fame had been linked to the Bounty Mutiny.

When Captain Bligh was put on the long-boat with the other dissidents by Fletcher Christian, they were left in the middle of the ocean. Bligh, with his knowledge of the area, set his main course for Batavia, lying far to the east. Realising that more drinking water was required, Bligh set the initial part of the course for the island of Tofua. He knew that water was available there, and that once there, he would be able load all the water the longboat could carry.

It was on this island that he suffered the only loss of a mariner during this epic voyage to Batavia. The natives had become unsettled and uneasy as water was put on board the cutter. All were safe on aboard, with the exception of one mariner who was pushing the cutter into deeper water. At this point, this seaman was attacked and killed. He had to be left behind, the cutter now making haste to escape the natives.

Living on Norfolk Island, and its links with the Bounty, had made me aware of this amazing episode of the Bounty Mutiny. It was a strange feeling, looking at this Island. I tried to make arrangement to go there, to see Tofua closer to hand, but the tourist-style vessel which the resort hired had an engine problem.

The days flew along, and I made plenty of QSOs. Band conditions were good in comparison to those of a week earlier. The inverted-V antenna also worked well. The accommodation was ideal and I would have no hesitation in recommending it.

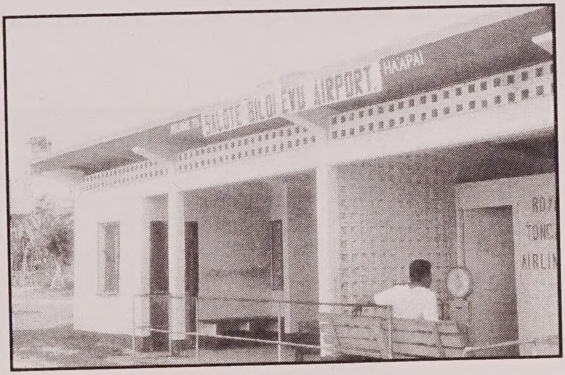
All too soon it was time to make a start to get my things packed once again and commence my travel back to Norfolk Island, via Auckland. As it happened, everything went off well, and I made my connecting flight to Auckland. Some time later, I made my connection to Norfolk Island, and a couple of hours later I was home. All had gone well and, more importantly, I had learned something about Tonga and its people.

The Friendly Islands is an excellent description and a perfect name for the Kingdom of Tonga; exactly what I found.

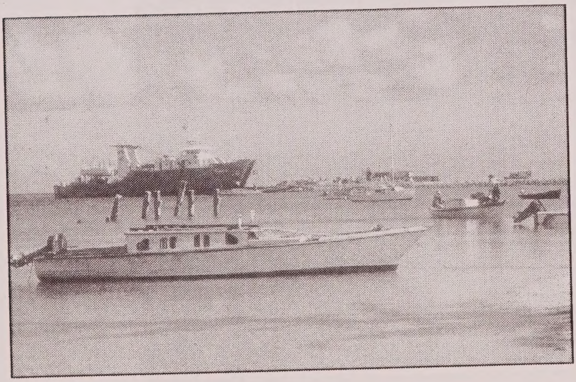
Ha'apai OC -169

ONGAN AIRLINES

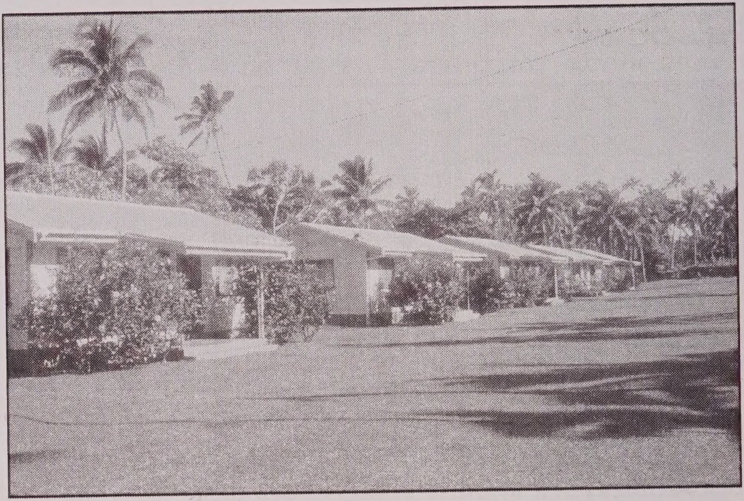
Tonga Airlines plane at Salote Bilolevu Air Port.


SALOTE BILOLEVU AIRPORT. HAAPAI
ROY
TONG
AIRLI

Salote Bilolevu Airport, Ha'apai Island.



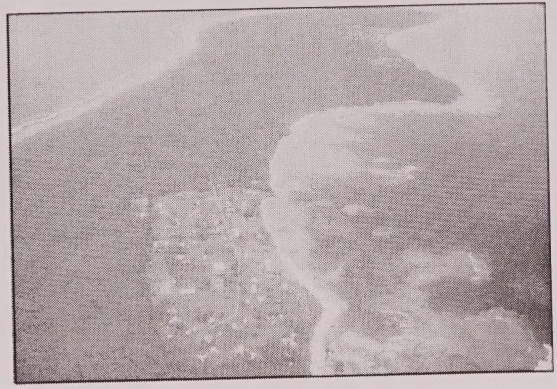
Ha'apai harbour is very close to the Chalet area.



A chalet of the Ha'apai tourist area site makes an ideal shack.

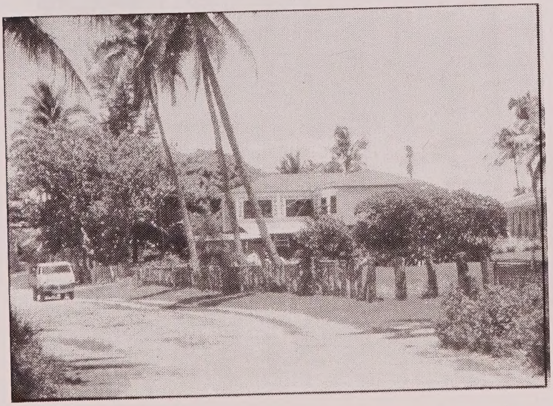
My HF6V vertical used on Ha'apai.

Niuatopatapu.

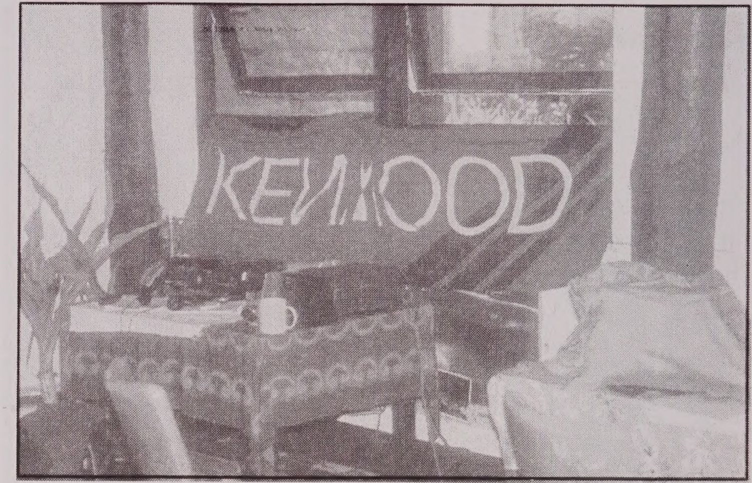


Arrival overhead of Niuatopatapu, Tonga.

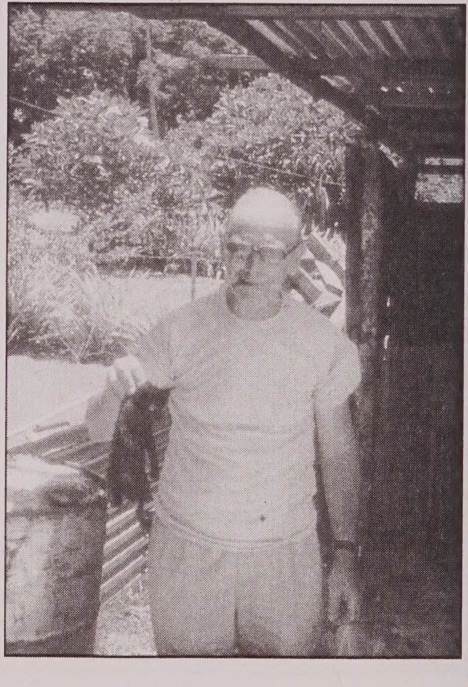
Unloading baggage Niuatongatapu, Tonga.



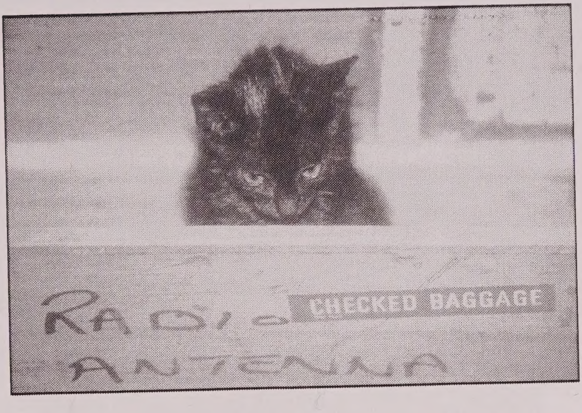
Catholic Mission, site for A35MR/P operation.



Very simple A35MR/P station used on Niuatoputapu.



Kevin enjoys a break from operating.


RADIO
ANTENNA
CHECKED BAGGAGE

It is very comfortable in here, I like it.

HF6V vertical antenna on the roof of the Mission.

Niuatoputapu, it is morning school bus time.

615
NIUATOPUTAPU

School taxi service, Niuatoputapu style..

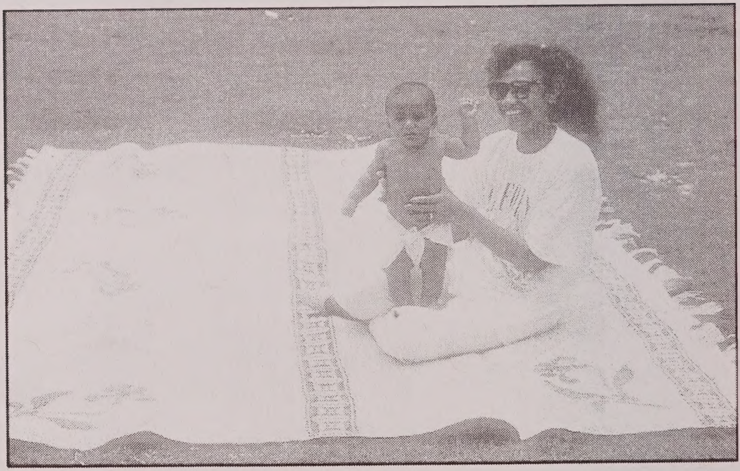
All dressed up in school uniform.

The famous or infamous root of the Kava plant.

The local village store – the stock everything store.

Collecting mat weaving material after school.

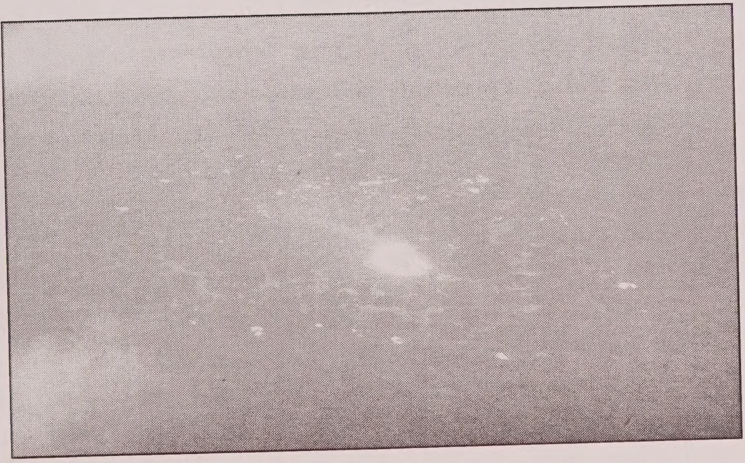
On Niuatoputapu, mat weaving is a thriving industry.



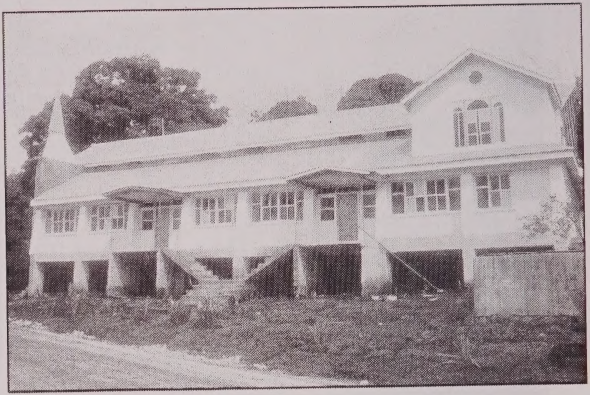
An excellent example of Niuatoputapu mat weaving.

Vava'u

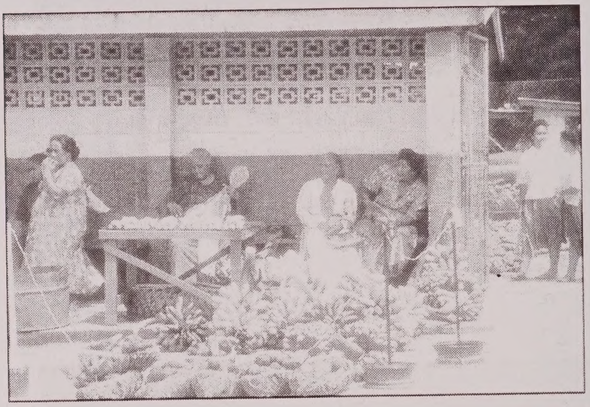
Overlooking Vava'u and the yacht mooring area.



Flying in the Tongan region, there are thousands of islands.



One of the many churches in Vava'u.



One of the fruit and vegetable stalls in Vava'u.

Local Catholic school children outing.

Chapter 27

DXPEDITION TO WAKE ISLAND

WR1Z/KH9

Flying Backwards to Christmas

Wake Island or, more correctly, 'atoll', is crescent-shaped and is really the rim of an extinct volcano with the central lagoon being the old crater. The three linking Islands forming the rim of the atoll are only 12 feet above sea level! Wake is the largest of the Islands, and along with Peale Island forms one leg with Wilkes Island forming the other. The Islands are home to thousands of sea birds. Terns, boobies, frigate birds and others, make up the population with many of the birds being migratory. The Island has plenty of 'hermit' crabs, those bright red scavengers of many of the Pacific Islands. The Island group is isolated, some 2,000 miles from Hawaii, 1,200 miles from Guam, 1,000 miles from Midway, 600 miles from Kwajalein and some 500 miles from Eniwetok.

The island was first discovered, in October 1568, by Alvaro de Mendana de Neyra, a Spaniard who named it 'San Francisco'. Over 200 years later, in 1796, Captain Wake of the *Prince William Henry*, a British schooner, rediscovered it and named it Wake Island. Early in the 18th century Wake was well known and already had several names:

Wake's Island, Wakes Weeks, Wreck, Halcyon, Helsien and Wilson, to name but a few of them.

On the 4th July 1898, General Francis V. Greene claimed the island for the USA, and for good measure, the ceremony was repeated a few months later in January 1899 by Commander Edward D. Taussig. Later, in 1899, General JJ Pershing raised the US flag. From that day onwards, many events took place; for example, the Island became a stop-over point for the famous trans-Pacific flying boat service. This was prior to the outbreak of WWII after which it became a US Military base.

The idea of visiting Wake Island had been suggested several times in the past by Tom, AH9AC. I hade known Tom for many years (in fact from back in the 60's) and he was now based on Wake. Some time previously, Tom was once again asking about my coming to Wake Island as it seemed that he was going to be on a re-assignment. In short, the message was: "If you are sure you mean it, come here now!"

Since the first invitation, I had been Stateside and had passed my Extra Class US License; I was the proud owner of a US callsign, WR1Z. The idea of my using WR1Z/KH9 on a DXpedition to this remote US area in the Pacific was appealing. Soon it was, "Look out Tom, Wake Island here I come".

The possible visit depended on obtaining permission. In the beginning, this required the permission of the Base Commander, Wake Island. It may not be easy; I was a civilian and a foreign national to boot. As it happened, Tom was quick to obtain the agreement of the current Base Commander. However, in one of those on-going transitions of military life, a week later the Commander was replaced. The new, temporary Commander was not in agreement with my visit, and within a matter of days everything had come to a grinding halt.

A couple of weeks passed, and Tom mentioned that the new Base Commander had arrived to take up his post. He would arrange to speak with him, but also suggested that I, too, should try to get in touch with his office. A couple of weeks before, I had established contact with Wake Island both by phone and fax. After allowing a few days to lapse, to let the changes of staff settle in, I telephoned the Commander's office.

Telephoning Wake Island was not an easy task and one needed patience. After getting through, I was speaking to the second in charge. As I outlined my situation he was sympathetic; 'no problems'; send the Major a Fax or letter. A few minutes later he had copied down all my relevant information and we parted the best of friends. I promised a follow-up Fax confirming the details and so next day. I chose the morning Wake Island time when I thought the lines would be quiet, and the Fax went through on the first attempt.

Speaking to Tom on a sked later in the day, he told me that the Fax had been received and that approval had already been given by the Base Commander. With this approval, 'orders' were now being prepared to allow me to travel on a military aircraft (the only way to get to Wake Island). A number of conditions were attached, not least of these being that I should have to pay for my travel. Quickly, word came through that my booking had been made for the 21st June, Hawaii to Wake Island flight. I had plenty to do and time was short.

US Military planes organise everything on the premise that the passenger is permitted two pieces of baggage, plus one carry-on item. This would be my first ever DXpedition with no rig as Tom had kindly offered me the loan of his spare rig, a TS 440S. It also meant that I would not carry my trusty Butternut HF 6V as this would count as one package! Nor did I have to carry my lap-top, or any RTTY gear, as Tom promised he would loan me his equipment for a couple of days. Events were to prove that I would have been able to book in several items with no difficulties. Nevertheless, I did travel with a pile of bits and pieces: a power supply for the TS 440S, two lengths of coax, an FL 2100Z linear, log books, wire, key and a 1 kW Antenna Tuner.

The flight from Norfolk Island to Hawaii was straightforward, and much to my pleasure no charges were made for my excess baggage. On arrival, with the hotel near by, I was soon in my room and settling in. With a couple of days to wait, there would be no mad rush, and one of those days would be used to collect my Orders, ticket and any other bits and pieces. Rick, KH6JEB, (now a SK) was helpful, he knew the military system backwards. His assistance during my brief stay in Honolulu was invaluable. Rick and I had a brief get-together with Kan, JA1BK, who by a coincidence was also in Honolulu. Later I also shared in one of the famed Honoluan ham breakfasts. There I met several of the KH6 amateurs and ate a wonderful breakfast.

The day after my arrival, I picked up my 'Orders' and then paid for and received my flight ticket. On the morning of departure for Wake, via Kwajalein, Rick picked me up at around 5 am and took me to Hickham Air Force Base. There I checked in with no problems at all, or at least it appeared so. Unseen at this time, my baggage was being tagged with Kwajalein instead of Wake tags! Rick and I never agreed on what happened, how two of my four checked-in items went to Wake Island and the other two were off-loaded at Kwajelein. Neither could we agree on why two important items of my baggage did go to Wake. The other two items of lesser importance made it to Kwajelein. This is in direct conflict with Murphy and his laws - he must have been temporarily busy on other matters.

Some days before my departure from Norfolk Island Tom mentioned a problem; the room scheduled for my

Amateur Radio activities had been used previously for Military Amateur Radio Service (MARS) activities. These days, along with many other buildings, it no longer had AC power connected. For safety reasons, the power had been disconnected from this unoccupied building. He was doing his best to have power re-connected ready for my arrival.

The title for this Wake Island chapter is a strange one. The words firmly stuck in my mind, based on a thought which crossed my mind on boarding that military plane. The words 'Flying backwards to Christmas', is a parody of an old UK Radio Show called 'The Goons'. In a recording made at the height of their crazy, zany popularity, part of one song said: "I'm walking backwards to Christmas across the Irish sea!" It was on the military jet at Hickham Air Force Base, in Hawaii, en route for Wake Island that the song came into my mind. I had already been warned that being seated backwards was the way one had to travel. This was considered the safest way of transporting military staff by air. It was hard to get the song and the words out of my mind.

The flying backwards routine felt strange, but since the plane had no passenger windows, after a couple of minutes, one hardly felt the difference. Stuffing the mandatory military issue ear plugs in my ears, things became much quieter; noise was down by several decibels. The several hours trip to Kwajalein passed quickly and we were soon at the terminal for a one hour stop-over. We re-boarded the plane (those steep aircraft 'ladders' are tough) and we were on our way. After a short flight, the plane was on 'let down' for Wake Island.

After landing, completing formalities, and meeting Tom, AH9AC, I discovered that two pieces of my baggage had not arrived. I left the baggage tags at the airport, and I was assured that the items would be on Wake on the next available aircraft.

On boarding Tom's rusted-out truck, we were soon on our way to the accommodation and messing area. We stopped for a few minutes to look over the building where I would operate; there we off-loaded the radio gear, power supply and some of my personal effects.

Shortly after, I checked into my accommodation which was comfortable and air-conditioned. The shower and toilet facilities were in the middle of a passage between two rooms, the arrangement being that the occupant of only one room could access the facilities at a time.

At this point, it is a good idea to mention 'The Beam'. The word brings cheer to the heart of any DXer. Tom had mentioned on one of our skeds that Sam, N1GMG, based on Kwajelein, was now on Wake doing some installation work. He was due to leave the base the morning after I arrived, using that same plane. Sam also had a beam that I could use during my stay. It all sounded wonderful.

After the accommodation matters had been settled, I returned to the old MARS site and there I met Sam. He had managed to get power connected to the room and we had three wall outlets and a couple of lights. Sam had also scrounged an old air-conditioning unit which was moving some air around. The room had two doors, no windows, but it did have a desk and a couple of chairs. Tom had already left his TS 440S transceiver on the desk, ready for my use.

By this time, it was 3 or 4 in the afternoon and hot, at over 30C. The 'Beam', a TH7XX, was propped up against the back wall of the room; the two original packages had never been opened! But, Sam had already erected a small tower with a rotator in place. The rotator cable and coaxial cable ran to the shack whilst the tower leaned against the building at about 45 degrees; he had been busy.

Sam was a person with a real 'get up and go for it' personality. He apologised that he had been unable to get the beam installed; he was leaving in the morning, but meantime, let's put the beam together!! See what I mean? I tried to explain that putting the TH7DXX together took a considerable amount of time. It wasn't until later, as the beam got larger and larger, that he realised what he had purchased for his short stay on Wake Island!

Many hours later, at 2.30 am next morning, I was in a state of collapse. Sam and I had worked almost non-stop to put the beam together. I fumbled with tiredness to assemble the phasing lines to the elements and boom by the light of the pick-up truck. I felt drained and exhausted. It had been a long, gruelling session for us both through the hot afternoon with those high temperatures. This was followed by the long evening and early morning stint. We picked up the beam and walked it around the building to a position near the tower. By standing it on two chairs, the beam was off the ground and we were able to complete the boom and beam mounting arrangements.

In the shack, Sam expressed surprise at how well things had gone and agreed that he, too, had had enough. He then drove me back to my room. It was then that I realised that I had forgotten to mention a telephone call received about 7 pm the previous evening. It seemed that my allocated room would not be available until the plane had left for Kwajalein. A female passenger in the MACS flight had been allocated that adjoining room and it was against regulations to have a male and female in adjoining rooms! Ah well, such is life!

To be honest, I could not have cared less and I crashed on my temporary bed allocation. Sam was going to 'pop' back to the site to pack his tools and gear, ready for the flight departure in a few hours. I had already used his tools to change over my equipment items to 115 AC from the usual 230 AC.

When I got back to the shack after breakfast next morning, I discovered that Sam had 'lied' (maybe fibbed is a kinder word) to me. He had gone back as agreed to collect all his tools and tidy up, but had also pushed the tower up to its vertical position, and run three guys, and, and, and….quite amazing.

Later that same afternoon, after a final finishing inspection of the beam, checking dimensions and the various joints of the beam elements, I completed the project. By the use of a Cherry-picker, organised by Tom, the beam was lifted in place, and soon after was in working order. Sam, by this time, had been back on Kwajalein several hours.

I checked into the 14222 kHz HIDXA Net for a short time to let everyone know that I had arrived okay and was on the air. I arranged a sked with Kirsti, VK9NL, which worked out fine; it was always easy to keep in touch with Norfolk Island during my stay.

Over the first few days of operating WR1Z/KH9, conditions in the room were uncomfortable. The air conditioning was in name only and outside temperatures were up in the 30C range. The room was hot, dusty, and dry. Also, in those early days, I had endless running up and down to the tower, getting 160m, 80m and the 40m antennas working. An old beat-up Butternut HF6V vertical, left on site, gave me an approach to the WARC bands by using my antenna tuner and so the QSO total gradually rose. One day a loud bang from the FL 2100Z amplifier echoed around the room as the power fuse blew. On checking, I found that one 572B tube had failed, but more difficult was the fact that the plate coupling capacitor was blown apart. I carried a set of spare tubes, but that was it.

It took a mere 12 hours to find a possible replacement for the blown 1000 pf, 3000V capacitor. When Suwi, a Thai technician arrived, he had four capacitors. One was to prove perfect; an old Dubilier, WWII mica capacitor. This was the base approach - to help me, if at all possible.

The whole episode was also a blessing in disguise because Suwi was not happy with my working conditions. He made a quick telephone call and in 5 minutes he had the air-con people out, who removed the unit. They brought it back next morning in perfect working condition, and life became much better. I had been helped yet again.

At this point, one of the air-condition technicians mentioned that the AC volts drop on the 115 VAC line was excessive. I had been aware of this and I had been hard pushed to get 250 Watts out of the FL 2100Z, the plate voltage dropping from about 2,200 V off load to around 1,600 V on load. When they tried to switch on the air-con unit to the 'High Cold' position, things just folded, lights dimmed, oops! It was discovered that the temporary power line tie was almost 300 yards long and did not come from the adjacent building! The AC power line problem was something that we were unable to resolve.

The following days passed by quickly. Even running on the low setting, the air-conditioning improved my life style. It was enough to beat the hot weather outside and as I cycled to and from the base area proper, it was always nice to get into the air-con of my room or the air-con of the shack. I became a cyclist, biking backwards and forward with cokes, ice cubes, food, or whatever. The road was flat, with always a fair breeze blowing.

I was able to be active on all bands and, for a couple of days, also got on to RTTY. Tom, true to his word, loaned me his laptop computer together with a PK-232 MBX terminal unit. Getting on RTTY became a major headache, but I was able to find a fix by using the Kenwood hand-held microphone as a terminal point. This allowed me to patch the PK-232 into the TS 440S mike socket. I was happy there was no radio inspector to check my work, but you know that old saying 'Needs Must'. I made several hundred RTTY QSOs.

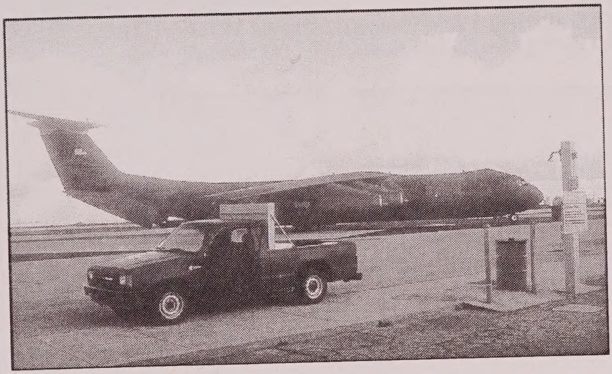
With DXpeditions, I find that time flies and to be successful, one has to pay attention to 'best times' for a particular area. I always work with the DX Edge in front of me, as it gives one a feel for the world and its time: Sunrise in New York, sunset in New Delhi, or whatever. Yet, it is always a nice surprise to pick up that PY station and realise that he had just finished his breakfast, and had taken his coffee into the shack.

Propagation was changing and I had a few lousy days. 10m was dead to all intents and purposes. No longer were there those wonderful pile-ups in the day-time to keep the QSO total rising, but with over 12,000 QSOs in the WR1Z/KH9 logs there must have been plenty of propagation to somewhere. I enjoyed the European pile-ups and had several good band openings. Splits were never more that 5/10 kHz. My one regret was the discovery that Tom's TS 440S was not fitted with a CW filter; a lack that made CW and as mentioned earlier, RTTY operation, hard work and at times almost impossible. My CW total was around half of the final QSO total. This was a good outcome when one considers that wide IF bandwidth of the transceiver.

My thanks go to Tom, AH9AC; the Base Commander of Wake Island; the MARS Unit; Rick, KH6JEB; Sam, N1GMG, of course and many others on the base who helped make the idea of a DXpedition to Wake Island a reality. I enjoyed my visit.

NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN
WAKE ISLAND

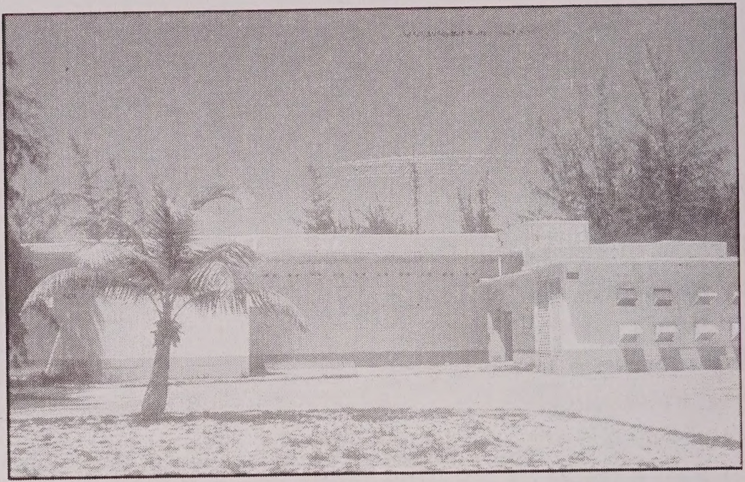
This postcard gives a good view of Wake Island.



Our MATS plane on the tarmac, Wake Island.

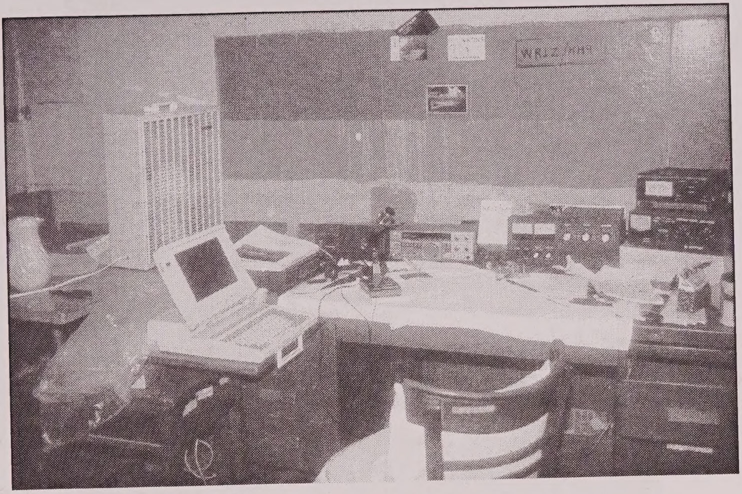
Where America's Day
Really Begins

Early morning in down-town Wake Island.



Old MARS station Wake Island, site of WR1Z/KH9.

HF6V vertical used for WR1Z/KH9 operation.

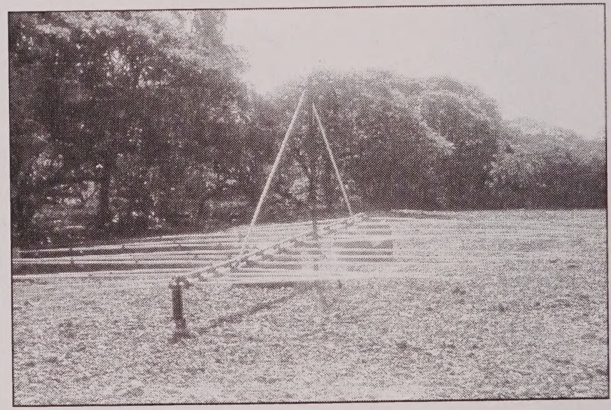


My station on Wake Island signing WR1Z/KH9.

Close up of operating position WR1Z/KH9, Wake Island.

The beauty of Wake Island.

The huge beam installed for KR1Z/KH9 operation.



Assembled military style log-periodic antenna.

Chapter 28

PORT BLAIR, ANDAMAN ISLANDS

The strange case of Mani, VU2JPS and Mala VU2MTC

August - September 1995

It 1995, about February or March if I remember correctly, I was approached on the 20m Band with a question: "What did I know about Mani, VU2JPS?" "It is strange," said the questioner, "He says that he's in Port Blair Andaman Islands. He operates on both CW and SSB and is often on at around 0200 UTC on 20m SSB, going QRT at the drop of a hat!" "He had a good signal on 20m SSB about an hour ago, I had a good QSO and then he disappeared." The VK gave the frequency of his QSO and he had set my mind in motion; Andaman Islands, CW and SSB with a VU2 callsign. To be frank, I was suspicious and started to check each day to see if he was around. I had my beam over into his area and sure enough, a couple of days later, I came across VU2JPS, name Mani, in QSO with a VU station.

In the next few days, I hung around the frequency and a day or so later at around 0200 UTC, there he was again and I gave him a call. Working him was not difficult. He gave me a good report, said he was in Port Blair and then promptly went QRT. It seemed that Steve, the VK station, was correct about his comments and I had now experienced the same 'treatment.' I was intrigued, and after finding out more on the general behaviour of Mani, I decided to try to do something.

It had to be done with discretion. That old saying "No names, no pack drill" routine came to mind and I made a start. I had learned two things on my occasional eavesdropping; Mani seemed genuine and he had mentioned (for all to hear) that he worked for All India Radio in Port Blair. I telephoned the Indian Embassy in Australia and asked if they were able to provide the telephone number of All India Radio in Port Blair. With hardly a stumble, the woman gave me the telephone number. I thanked her and put the phone down.

I did a quick bit of mental calculation. Let us say a morning start time of about 0900 local time and at around that time I telephoned the number. After a couple of rings, a woman answered "All India Radio reception" and a couple of minutes later I was speaking to the Chief Engineer in charge of the station in Port Blair.

On enquiring about Mani Subramanian, he apologised and said he was not available right now as he was off-shift. He would be available around this same time on Thursday. Now I thought that was good going, but he added; "If you use this number you immediately connect straight through to the transmitting station. No need to come through our office switchboard using this direct number." I thanked him, after answering a couple of questions about Norfolk Island. He knew where it was and I had introduced myself as calling from the Island.

It is strange how things turn out sometimes and sure enough, a couple of days later I telephoned the TX station and you guessed it, Mani answered! He was almost speechless with surprise and he did remember our QSO a few days previously. After some introductory small talk, he confirmed that he was licensed as VU2JPS and that his wife Mala was licensed as VU2MTC! Yes, he had authority to operate from his house which was the government property of All India Radio and he was employed there as an engineer.

He had been in Port Blair for some time, but it had taken a long time for their personal belongings (shipped by them) to arrive. A few weeks previously he had been able to get back on the air. In addition, it had taken a few months before they had both received their amended licenses back from New Delhi. In India, an Amateur Radio license is tied to the location given at the time of issue. ANY change of address makes the license void, until the new address is approved and duly entered on the license. In their case, their amended licenses now showed the new address of their All India Housing unit e.g. Block 3 section 4, or whatever. I felt that they were both certainly legal.

On those sudden shut-downs and QSYs, Mani said, "I have simple home made equipment, many problems and people do not understand my position." It all sounded legal and above board to me. Mani also said that he had come on the air around mid-December 1994, but it had taken him some time to get his equipment working as it had been in storage many months.

In addition, he told me of the frustration of having to answer questions during every contact made: "Yes he was in Port Blair, etc". I mentally blushed at this, of course; I too had asked him his location! Many were saying that he should change his prefix, become a VU7! I felt if his VU2JPS license was endorsed with his Andaman address, it should be valid. I also told him that for more years than I cared to remember, Fred, VU2ANI, operated from Port Blair and was perfectly valid for DXCC. In fact VU7 was not the prefix for the Andaman and Nicobar group, and I mentioned that the VU4 prefix had been assigned to the Andaman and Nicobar Group. In the back of my mind I recalled that maybe the VU7 prefix had been used in Port Blair many years ago.

I will not go into too many details, but I had been in the process of trying to get an Indian Amateur Radio license for some time. In May 1995, I had been issued a 5 year Indian multiple entry visa, duly entered in my passport. I decided that, if possible, I would try to visit Mani and Mala in Port Blair. This was a possibility on a trip to the UK with a 'slight diversion', and I had always wanted to return to the Nicobar/Andaman area. Therefore, I made a decision that I would try to visit Mani and Mala and with luck might also be able to re-visit Car Nicobar.

My trip to Port Blair took me to Bangkok, Calcutta and then I disembarked in Port Blair itself. This was an extensive trip when I think about it. I arranged my accommodation in town (rather than the hotel areas), as it was quite close to where Mani lived and worked. The All India Radio compound was well known and after a telephone call and formalities complete, I was sitting in the office of the Chief Engineer - the same person that I had spoken to some months before on the telephone.

He was very pleasant, and on hearing of my occupation in communications he arranged that I should be shown around the studio and facilities. I was to enjoy this and I was taken into one area where steps were being taken to introduce TV to the Island. I had some knowledge on the subject. I knew how a TV signal was generated and for example how it was monitored and radiated, though I knew nothing about TV programming or studio work. I had explained that I wished to meet Mani and Mala and there were no problems with this.

Some time later, I was on my way to Mani's home and soon after, Mani, Mala and I were together and all surprised by events. They were amazed that I had come all the way from Norfolk Island to visit them. I enjoyed my visits with both these really nice, genuine people and I went there several times during my stay in Port Blair.

Of course, I was shown the rigs that Mani used and I have to say that it all surprised me. In our world of this all singing rig and that rig, the endless search for the best one, to face the reality of the situation of someone such as Mani and Mala was humbling. To become an active radio amateur, he had to build everything he needed. It took me straight back in time to my own struggles in the far off days of Singapore and my first license. It was mind-boggling to look around and see what he had made.

The memory stayed with me for a long time. When I was asked to give talks and show slides to fellow hams at various DX/HF conventions and meetings I still hear their gasps of surprise and recall comments made on Mani's station when we spoke later.

During my stay, I was able to assist Mani to put up a decent ground plane antenna, and I helped him fix a couple of things around the place and heard him operate.

We also went on an extensive tourist-style look around Port Blair. Mani knew the area well. We visited the notorious Port Blair detention area where, pre-independence, many Indian and other dissidents had been incarcerated. This was during the time when India was seeking its independence from British rule.

I asked Mani if he knew where Fred, VU2ANI, had lived and operated from. I have no idea who he asked, but a few hours later, we went to this house by taxi. The gates were closed and the large property stood well back from the road. A noisy rattling of the gate chain (an old Asian custom) brought the caretaker hurrying down the drive to open the gate. A couple of minutes later, we were standing in the forecourt of Fred's two-story house. The caretaker remembered Fred and when asked (by Mani) he showed us around the house and upstairs to the large room which had been Fred's shack. The house was in wonderful condition and was still owned by a European company.

It was a strange feeling to be there. I had spoken to Fred often over many years as we had this common bond. We were both Scots and I had been on Car Nicobar in earlier years. He had a wonderful and spacious shack. The view outside was dramatic, overlooking the sea. To my eyes, it must have been a wonderful radio location.

One further matter needed attention; this was to have Mani politely ask something of Fred's background and what had happened to him. I knew only that Fred was a Scot, but did not know that he had worked for Bryant and May (the huge UK match company – you may recall the brand was Swan Vesta). I was also unaware that he had died in Port Blair and was, in fact, buried at a nearby cemetery. No objections were raised to our going there and after arranging for some flowers (picked from the garden area) we headed to the cemetery. I was pleased that I was able to pay my respects to Fred. He must have had a wonderful life in Port Blair and with these few flowers I felt that we had finally met.

I was able to visit the downtown Government office which handled travel in the area; outlying Islands were all protected in an effort to protect the native populations. On raising the subject of possibly visiting Car Nicobar, this appeared impossible, although it was mentioned that the native Nicobar council did have a say in allowing certain visitors to the Nicobar Islands. There was interest in the fact that I had been on Car Nicobar and I still feel that if it had been possible for the office, I might have been given permission to visit the island for a few hours. But it was not to be - so near yet so far.

It was getting near the time to leave Port Blair so I made a decision that, if possible, HIDXA would help Mani and Mala with the donation of a station. It would not be new equipment (to avoid problems with customs) but a good used rig and an antenna. The remainder of my stay soon passed and I was on my way back to India. After a few days stop-over in New Delhi, I would fly on to the UK for a family visit.

The world is smaller these days when one thinks of how Fred travelled back to Scotland on his leave breaks every three years; it was a long trip in those days. Now, in a matter of a few hours one is back on the Indian continent.

I have kept in touch with Mani and Mala over many years; I always thought that somehow we would meet again. One day I received an e-mail message from a VK station who had spoken to Mani, VU2JPS, on 20m. The message was, 'Please pass our warm regards to Jim and Kirsti, from myself and Mala." It made me happy.

Pardon? Please repeat your question? Ah the rig? Yes, Mani and Mala did get that consignment of a Kenwood TS 680 rig, a 3 el. beam, a working rotator, coaxial cable and Morse key, courtesy of HIDXA members.

How it all got to them is another story. It became a frustrating 'cliff hanger' in fact. If you insist, I will write the story for you.

Amateur Radio and Indian Customs

Having often travelled, loaded down with expensive Amateur Radio equipment, I have reason to thank the integrity of the customs services. I have found that, on reading my customs declaration, they perhaps ask to see this or that item, and then clear me to proceed. In the case of items coming as 'cargo', travelling on the same plane, these items have to be cleared in a separate area. In a general sense, I had few problems. It is the last thing one needs - a conflict with the customs services. Honesty is the best policy. In the case of India, I was to discover that customs (apart from a passenger arriving by air) was a multi-layer brick wall. Later, I was to meet something similar in Bangladesh over unaccompanied baggage, which is another story.

In its simplistic form, in Indian Customs, one is not dealing with a Customs Officer, but several layers, each in line, often with financial enrichment in mind. With perseverance and a modicum of luck, a door opens, one passes through and the item(s) may then be carried out.

In the case of Mani, VU2JPS, at Port Blair, this Island had its own customs regime. I found them courteous. Although I was carrying radio equipment, since my onward destination was the UK and I was allowed through customs without difficulty.

As explained, I had nothing but admiration for Mani, VU2JPS and Mala, VU2MTC. Mani had equipment as a result of his own technical skills, but as mentioned before I was determined that, if at all possible, HIDXA would donate a humble station for their use.

I was fully conversant with Amateur Radio licensing in India and was in due course issued an Indian license VU2JBS. I knew of WPC and knew several of the officials within the various departments. In my discussion with the relevant authority, no perceived problem existed with the donation of 'used' Amateur Radio equipment. In fact, how this was to be done was laid down in their Rules and Regulations. I followed their outlined requirements and within a few weeks, received their Permit Documentation as follows:

Government of India
Ministry of Communications
Department of Telecommunications
Wireless Planning and Co-ordination Wing
New Delhi

Permit to import transmitting and receiving apparatus into India by Radio Amateurs.
Import Permit WPC-AMT/2216/96-Dehli
Dated 23 Feb. 1996
Name: P. Subramanian VU2JPS
License No. 10088

The Permit gave authorisation for the following used items; Kenwood TS 680-S transceiver, Ken Pro KR400 rotator and a Cushcraft 3 El. Beam. All items were listed as used and with a total value of $1,200. The Permit recommended an exemption from payment of duty.

The equipment with power supply, coaxial cable and leads was then air freighted from Norfolk Island on a QANTAS Air Way Bill to Mr. P. Subramani, c/o Customs Clearance, Shiram, New Delhi, India. Air Freight costs were $275.75 with an Air Way Bill charge of an extra $15.00. The invoice, 081-7701-9784, is dated 10 August 1996.

On the 13th August 1996, in response to a fax on official Government of India paper, the sum of $600.00 was transferred to Shri Ram, VU2SK, of the Department of Electronics, Electronics Nikeram, New Delhi. Shri Ram, VU2SK, had given me an assurance that our equipment would be cleared and forwarded to Mani in Port Blair. It is not my intention to bore you with the HIDXA File (1 ¼ inch thick) on the endless faxes and letters written. Mani was to receive the equipment a few days before Christmas, some 4 ½ months down the track.

When our consignment surfaced, we received a fax from Per Transport, India Pty., Ltd., an international freight forwarder. It was signed by Chander P. Roshi. It was a bill for US$ 1038.00! It listed the following charges:

Customs Duty	$ 260.00	(9000 rupee)
Demurrage	$ 230.00	(8000 rupee)
Customs Fine	$ 720.00)	(25,000 rupee)
On forwarding	$ 288.00	
	$1498.00	
Advance	$ 460	(16,000 rupee)
Payable	$1038.00	

A very sizeable amount!!

The document was dated 23 October 1996. To say that I was annoyed would be an understatement. The customs fine of $720.00 was outrageous.

The Customs form--NV/A202/1863/P6 (give or take a letter)—was attached. It said, in relation to the fine:

> *Goods imported in contravention of ITC Policy 2/10 section 111 of Customs Act 1862 - being restricted goods. I hereby certificate the goods - permitting redemption of payment of 20,000 rupee fine and a further penalty of 5000 rupees. Section 118 of the Customs Act 1962.*
>
> *Asst. Commissioner, (Customs).*

Of course, the whole thing was nonsense. HIDXA had WPC authorisation for the equipment and although it took time, a final solution was reached. In my familiarity with the British-style government departments, I knew what to do. I approached the Assistant Commissioner (Customs) in a direct manner by fax and phone. When that did not work, I went to his boss and also across the road to WPC. How was it that Customs could disregard all their work in issuing a permit for these items? Customs had sat on this 'gift consignment' for two months? Did the Commissioner believe that QANTAS would accept an illegal shipment, as was 'implied' in the attached customs form, to justify the fining of HIDXA this 25,000 rupees? I would of course approach QANTAS direct, if required.

It all sounds petty today, but it was a hard battle won over a mindless, entrenched and corrupt system. I have nothing but praise for the Commissioner (Customs) and his unravelling of the mess.

Mani was, of course delighted to receive his equipment in Port Blair. In my view, in his licensing fiasco, he never had a fair deal. That being said, almost ten years down the track, Mani and Mala still used the rig, the beam, et al. Mani stayed with All India Radio. He was promoted and still has the kindness to pass their warm regards via ham radio. I suppose, that can't be bad.

MANI, VU2JPS and ARRL DXCC

In visiting Mani, VU2JPS, (and his wife, Mala, VU2MTC) once formalities were over, Mani and I discussed licensing for Port Blair. By this time, many had irons in the fire, some well- meaning, others the opposite. Mani explained his situation to me as follows.

Mani's Amateur Radio license, VU2JPS, had been issued previously on the mainland listing his then current address as this was part of the requirements for the issue of a license. The use of the license was conditional on the station being located at the said address.

On re-location, still with "All India Radio", to Port Blair Andaman Island, Mani had submitted both of their licenses to WPC, New Delhi for the required change of address. This, for an Indian national, was a formality but also required confirmation and possible inspection of his new location. (NB: I am dealing with both VU2JPS and VU2MTC).

Soon after, in Port Blair, in accordance with licensing regulations, Mani had to get official acknowledgement and permission to set up his station in Port Blair. The location would also be confirmed, via All India Radio, thus satisfying WPC requirements.

I noted the changes to Mani's license. The location of his station had been changed to his current 'married quarters' (with address) within the All India Radio Compound. I also noted that his boss, the All India Station Engineer, had signed a 'no objection' statement. It had also been inspected!

Now, having these licenses (not copies) in my hands, I had no doubt that they were both genuine and okay in DXCC terms. I explained to Mani that perhaps a change should have been made from their VU2 prefix to a VU4 prefix for use in the Andaman and Nicobar group. But, in my view, WPC, New Delhi, were the licensing authority, and for whatever reason had decided that Mani and Mala should retain the VU2 prefix of their original licenses. I quoted Fred, VU2ANI, as an example of the many years of the use of VU2 in Port Blair.

DXCC had another opinion. They said that special permission was needed to operate from the Andaman Islands. In my view, Mani and Mala already had that in the inspection and agreement by All India Radio authorities to the station. And Andaman authorities had duly noted and countersigned both VU2JPS and VU2MTC licenses

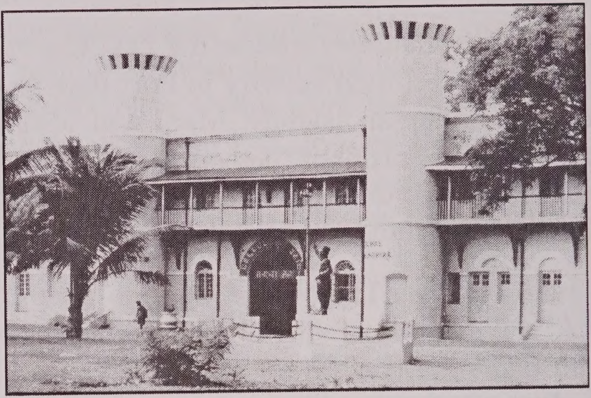
It became, in my view, a messy situation, as others were involved in trying to discredit Mani. For example, VU2**, wondered why it was possible for Mani and Mala to get authorisation, but that he was unable to do so? (Sound familiar?). It is my view, this blatant intrusion started to worry WPC in New Delhi. This same VU2** had even made a hurried visit to Port Blair and had met with both Mani and Mala. During the visit, he, too, checked the licenses held by Mani and Mala.

In the end, Mani and Mala were asked to return their licenses to New Delhi for correct endorsement. This was never completed and 'permission to operate' (inferred or otherwise) from Port Blair was disallowed.

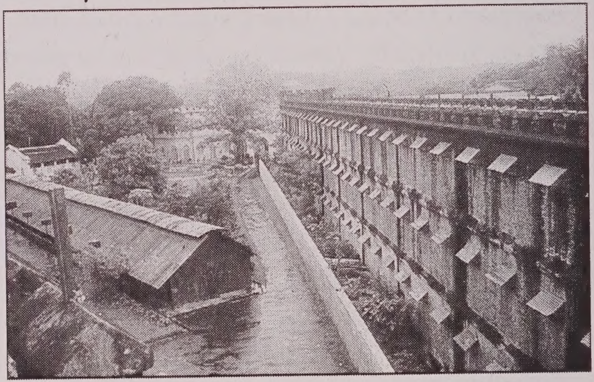
It had all taken several months and I was certain that permission would be forthcoming. Nevertheless, the fuss by the VU2** and, by this time, others had become very awkward and even nasty.

Having said all of this, with first hand knowledge, my view is this: All QSOs made by Mani and Mala from Port Blair prior to the hubbub should have been allowed.

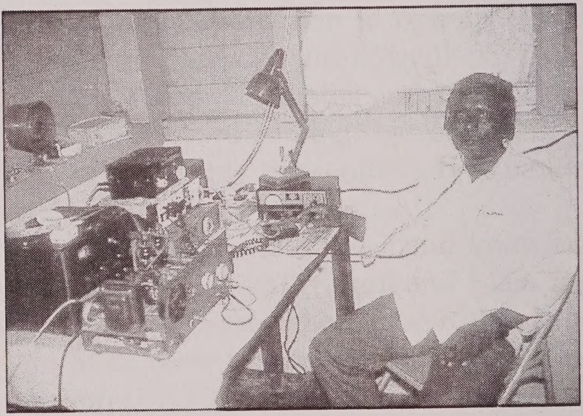
Mani and Mala were a couple of licensed VU2 stations with no idea of DXCC, no idea of making a name for themselves; a couple of really nice people caught up in the nastiness which sometimes infects the DXCC programme. DXCC never allowed their activity in Port Blair to count as credit for the Andaman Islands. Mani and Mala did not extend their stay in Port Blair (teenage son's education) and the family returned to India with Mani continuing his employment with All India Radio.



Tourist style picture of Port Blair prison.

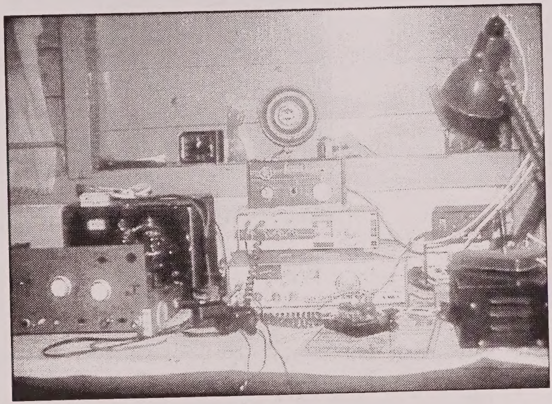


View from central control area of Port Blair prison.



Mani, VU2JPS with home brew CW/SSB station.

Mani, VU2MTC and Jim, Port Blair.



Joint VU2JPS and VU2MTC station, Port Blair.
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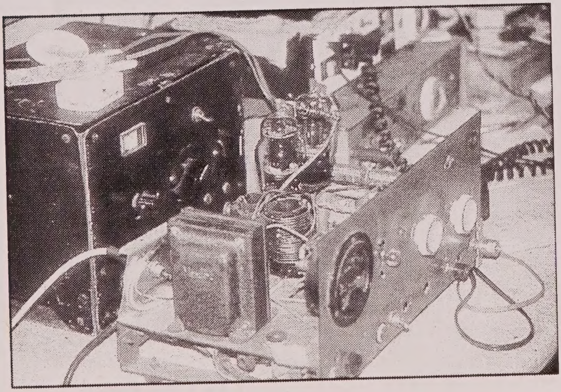
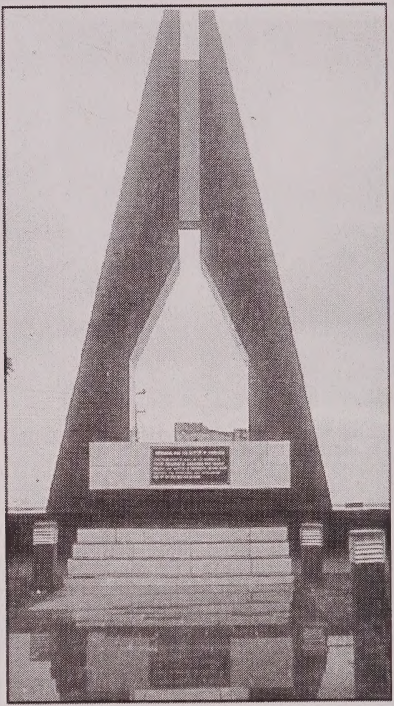
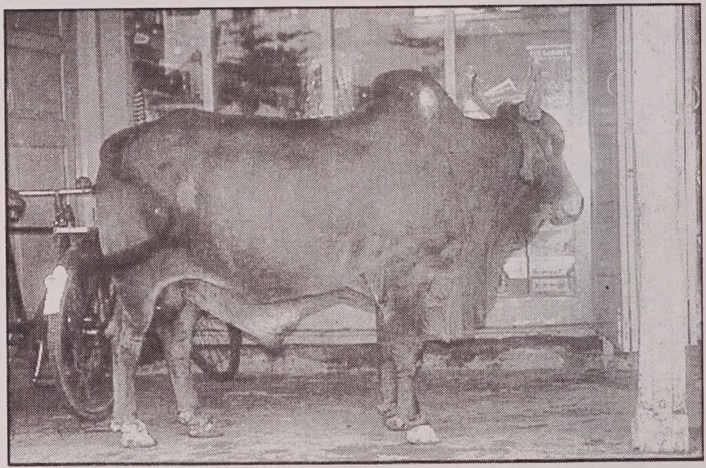


Mani's (VU2JPS) home brew amplifier.



Independence Arch, Port Blair.



Like Norfolk Island, cattle have right of way in Port Blair.

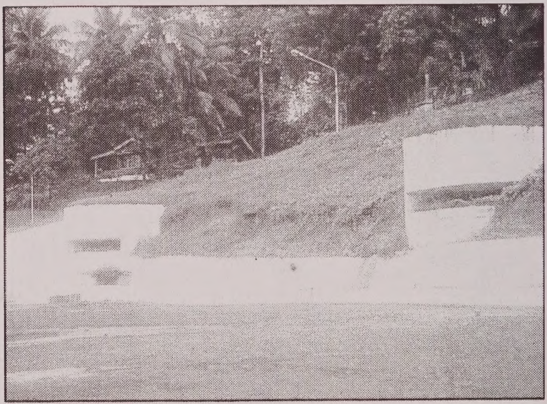
Typical roadside vegetable stall.

Roadside vegetable store, very cheap.

Home of VU2ANI (SK), outskirts of Port Blair.

View from veranda of old home of VU2ANI.

Mani, VU2JPS and Jim, graveside of VU2ANI.



WW II Japanese coastal protection bunkers.

Chapter 29

AMATEUR RADIO OPERATION FROM INDIA

VU2JBS. 3 November – 16 November 1997

About one year after my visit to Mani, VU2JPS, in Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman Islands, I began to think of the possibility of making an application for an Indian Amateur Radio License. I had visited India a few times over the years, but had never thought about Amateur Radio activity during a vacation or business trip. It had been difficult for a foreigner to get a VU Amateur Radio License, but it was said that times had changed. In late 1995, I completed and lodged an application for an Amateur Radio license to the Ministry of Communications in New Delhi.

The situation in India regarding the issue of Amateur Radio licenses to foreigners had been complicated, but now there was a licensing structure to process foreign applications. Both National and Foreign licenses are issued after extensive routine checks are carried out. The license is issued under certain strict conditions. The location of the station and the actual equipment and antenna are mandatory part of the license. Changing any of these 'points' results in the license requiring amendment before it is valid once again.

The Ministry of Communications, WPC Wing, is responsible for the issue of Amateur Radio licenses and an application must be made to this department. In my own case, my application took almost 6 months to be processed. Given the complication that I was a foreigner making the application, in my view, the time taken to process my application was reasonable. I had duly completed the application in a careful and correct fashion, and then submitted it in triplicate to WPC together with the license fee. I also attached a courtesy covering letter.

One must have a current Indian Visa and the Amateur Radio license, when issued, will then be valid for the period of the visa. In my case I opted to make an application for a five year visa which was processed within a few weeks. My VU2JBS license was therefore issued for a five year period, March 1996 - March 2001. Soon after the issue of my license, a change of WPC policy was made, licenses would now have to be renewed on a year by year basis. A change of address means the license will have to be officially amended.

My 5 year license was consequently changed to cover one year and I have since been through the renewal process without any difficulty. I have always found the staff of WPC courteous and friendly. In fact, during my stay in New Delhi in November 1997, I was able to meet many of the licensing staff.

In making arrangements to travel to India, I was worried about my arrival in New Delhi with all my radio equipment. On these DXpeditions it is quite amazing how the weight of it all builds up. My baggage was considerable and I had left Heathrow after paying several hundred dollars in excess baggage charges. I also carried a comprehensive list of all major items: the rig, antenna, keyer, coax cable and of course, my actual VU2 license documentation. I arrived at around midnight and made my way to the Customs area for clearance of my baggage. It turned out that all my worries had been unfounded. There is now a new customs system in place in India where foreign visitors are encouraged and assisted to make a smooth passage through the customs formalities. You must, of course, declare and show all dutiable items and they must be taken out of the country when you depart. A similar system is in place in Bangladesh where for example, all items e.g. your video camera or Amateur Radio equipment, is entered in your passport. On departure these items are checked.

The Indian Customs officer at the airport was helpful and after showing my license and list of radio equipment, my clearance through the customs area was then processed.

My friend Yannick, F6FYD, met me at the airport and as we all know, it is a wonderful feeling to be met after a long flight. I was tired, as the trip had not been the best. The plane was full and crowded and the passenger next to me was drunk and a real nuisance!! The hour long trip from the airport was easy as at 1 am the road traffic is reasonable. Yannick and his wife Nigiar made me very welcome and I was soon settled in my room, where I fell fast asleep almost instantly.

The next day Yannick and I made a start to setting up the station in Yannick's work room and it did not take long to get everything together. The VU2JBS station was a modest one, using a Kenwood TS690S, with my trusty HF-6V Butternut Multi-band Vertical and I also had a set of multi-band radials. I have used this antenna on many DXpeditions. My TS 690S has a built in antenna tuner, which is a great help with any multi-band antenna. In India, many of the houses have flat roofs, and in a crowded country, this roof area gives more space to the home. It is used for many things, from drying the washing, sitting outside on a cool evening, or a place to sleep. The roof was an ideal site for my HF-6V vertical with its radial system and with the help of Yannick, the antenna was installed without any problems. Soon after, the station was ready and I made my first QSOs.

Operating from New Delhi was an interesting experience. Despite the low power of 100 watts and a modest antenna, I made many QSOs. I worked a lot of CW as it was a 'quieter' mode and gave little or no disturbance to the household. I made almost 3,000 QSOs over the few days of operating, which satisfied me that my VU2JBS license had been put to good use.

During my visit to India I was able to do several things, including going to WPC, sightseeing and buying a few souvenirs. New Delhi is a huge, busy city and the traffic has to be experienced to be believed, if one is used to living on Norfolk Island! Travelling around in the city is daunting. Extensive moves had been made to make the city and the road verges cleaner and greener, similar to Singapore, with trees and shrubs everywhere. These have helped to absorb some of the fumes and pollution. Also, there are many large areas of spacious parks and we visited several of these tourist attractions.

The various markets are amazing. Once again, in comparison to life and shopping on Norfolk, the world is alive and kicking, with hundreds of mini-scenes catching one's eye, from a fruit stall, flower stalls and dozens of different things being sold from suitcases; everything from watches, to shirts, to shoes and other goodies. An endless variety of wares took me back to my earlier days in the Far East and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Not quite the whole truth - I did have to spend about two hours at the local police station!! It wasn't that they wanted to lock me up, but that someone had picked my pocket and I was reporting the theft to the police! It was a sad experience for me, as I should have known better. My wallet, my money; my credit cards (very important when travelling) were all stolen, including my reading glasses.

Anyone who needs glasses to read knows what I mean - life is just not the same if one is unable to read the small print. However, there was one plus, I still had a shirt on my back!

Yannick, Nigiar and I also visited with Bharathi, VU2RBI, husband Prasad, VU2DBP and family, one evening and this was pleasant. The next day we visited her again at the Offices of the RAJIV GANDHI FOUNDATION - AMATEUR RADIO CLUB and I tried to help with some of their equipment problems. I soon found that the antenna, a tri-band beam, had seen better days. The beam had a high SWR on all three bands and inspection showed that one side of the coax balun was not connected. Corrosion had spoiled the joint to the driven element. Another problem in the driven element was several poor joints between tubing sections. In fact, the beam needed a complete overhaul with all elements requiring attention and cleaning of the joints. But, with our limited time, it was not possible to do much more. Yannick went back a week or two after I had left and carried out additional maintenance work on the equipment and antenna. The verdict was that a new beam was an immediate requirement. A few days later, Bharathi and family visited Yannick and Nigiar and of course, wanted to see the VU2JBS station. I have a couple of nice photos with Bharathi operating my rig.

I met several VU license holders during my visit to the WPC offices. My Amateur Radio world started on Car Nicobar in the late 1940's, which in those far off days had been handed over to India, in 1947, when the country became independent from Britain. I am a Scot and have a British passport by the way. I enjoyed being able to say hello to a few of the active VU stations. I am a member of the IARS; at least they have some small input from my membership.

During my days of operating as VU2JBS, I had several QSOs with my old friend Mani, VU2JPS and Mala, VU2MTC. It was nice to hear their wonderful signal with the great audio quality of that Kenwood TS 680S, which HIDXA donated whilst he was in Port Blair. I had planned to visit Mani and Mala during my stay in India; it would have been a happy reunion. They lived a few hundred miles from New Delhi, but the loss of my wallet stopped my plans, and for that matter, several other things!

Another highlight of my stay in New Delhi was a visit to The Royal Embassy of Bhutan where I met Ambassador Nado Rinchhen. The Bhutanese Embassy Building and gardens are magnificent and on stepping through the gates, I felt as though I was back in Bhutan. I spent almost an hour with his Excellency and during this private visit, we discussed many issues. It was enjoyable, but he had one bit of bad news in that Yonten, A51TY, was in hospital here in New Delhi! He had collapsed at home in Thimphu and ended up in bed under intensive care. It was arranged for him to be flown to New Delhi for tests to be carried out.

His wife, Tujii, had accompanied him and was being accommodated at the hospital. I was told that he had been incapacitated, but was now progressing well. You will have read that I had met Yonten on a previous visit to Bhutan in 1990.

On my departure I received a courtesy gift from His Excellency, who arranged for my return to Yannick's house in the Embassy car, a thoughtful gesture this was thoughtful of him.

As luck would have it, after making several telephone calls to the hospital and speaking to Yonten's wife, I was able to visit Yonten. In earlier years he had been well known to the radio amateur world as AC5TY and later A51TY. (In 1972, the amateur radio prefix for Bhutan was changed from AC5 to A51.)

My hospital visit went well and Yonten, although very sick, was cheerful and I think he appreciated that I had come to say hello! A few days after my visit he underwent surgery. We would all meet again, in later months, under more reasonable circumstances. Next time in Bhutan, at the airport, Yonten would meet me and insist that I stay with him and his family whilst I was in Thimphu!

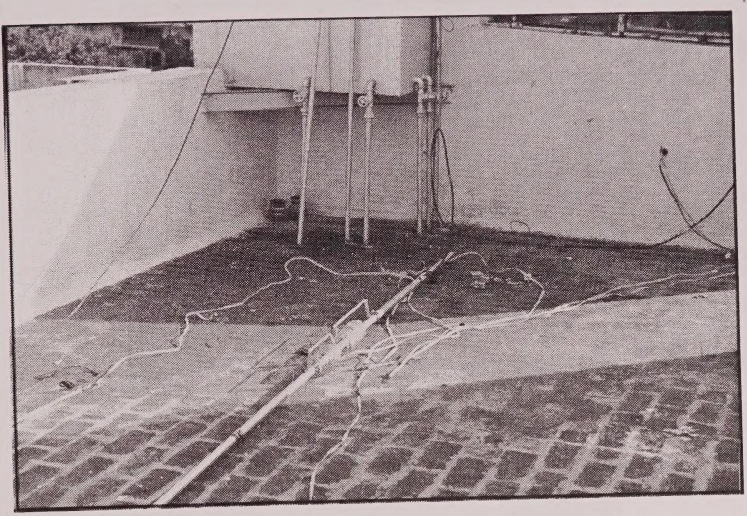
Yonten, after a few weeks in hospital, returned home to Bhutan and made a full recovery. It was a coincidence that we were both in New Delhi at the same time.

My 11 days stay in India came to a close and I headed for the airport and eventual return to Norfolk Island. Clearance through Customs at the airport was smooth and hassle free. I said my goodbyes to Yannick and shortly after, boarded the plane. Finally, safely home on Norfolk Island I began to unwind. The usual pile of mail lay bundled up, awaiting my return.

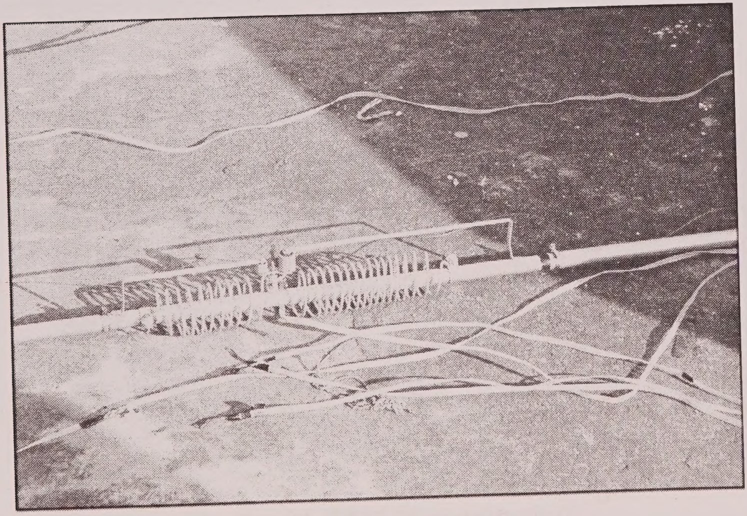
My sincere thanks to Yannick, F6FYD, and his wife Nigiar for their gracious hospitality. To WPC for their courtesy in processing my VU2JBS license. The callsign has now become special to me and I enjoyed operating from India. The many sights and sounds of New Delhi are a delight to remember.

Midnight arrival in New Delhi.

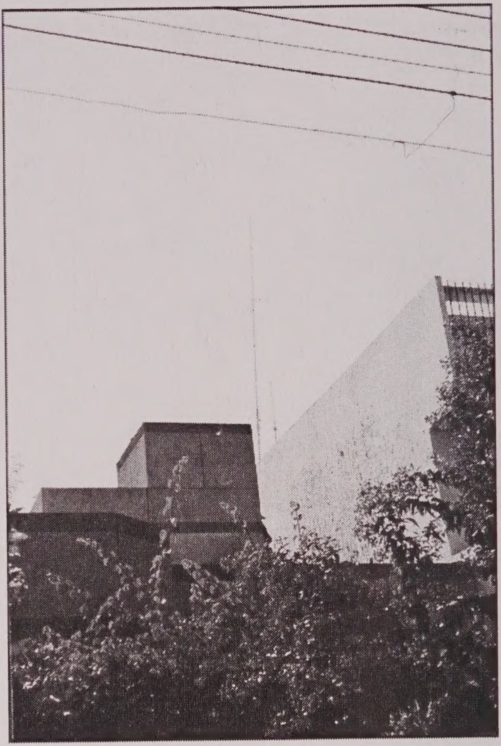
Part of my VU2JBS baggage, HF6V vertical in background.



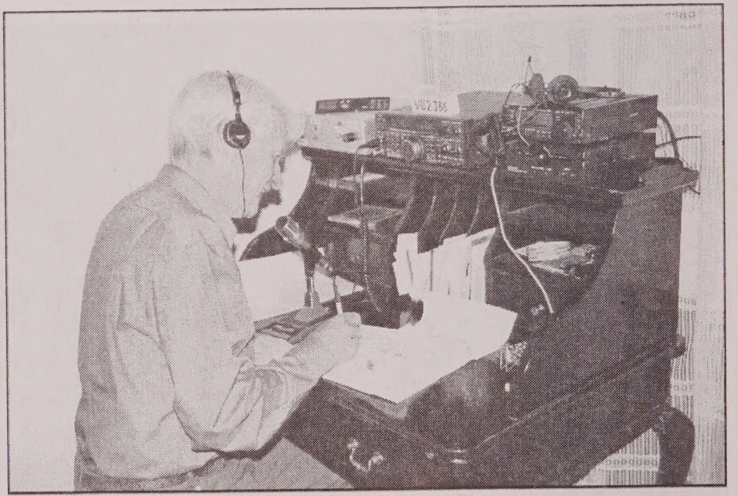
Assembling my HF6V vertical on the roof of the house.



HF6V vertical trap assembly, VU2JBS operation.



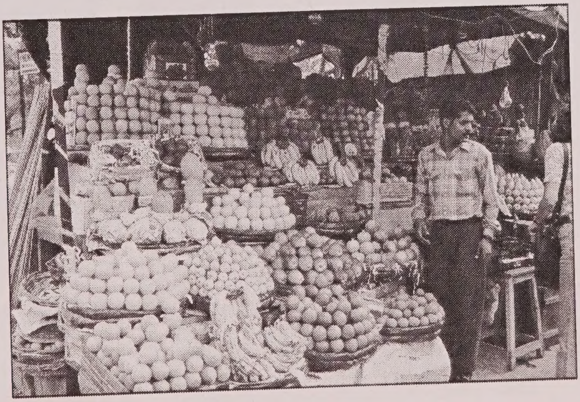
View of HF6V assembly from the road.



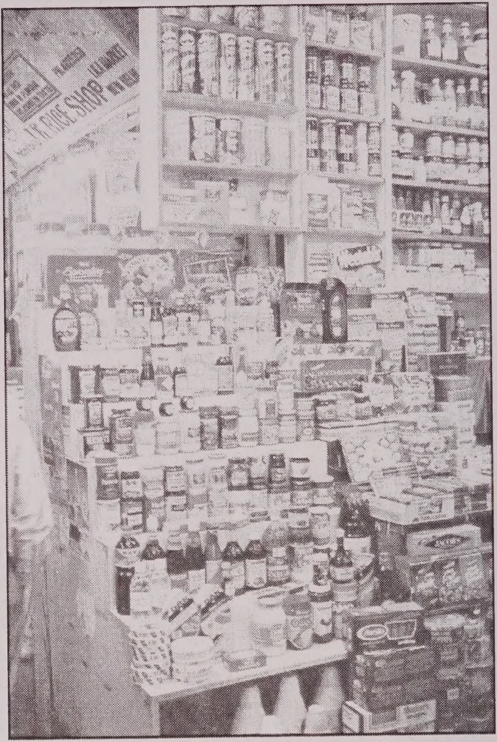
Operating as VU2JBS, New Delhi.

Bharathi, VU2RBI operating my VU2JBS station.

The very economical mini-taxi of New Delhi.



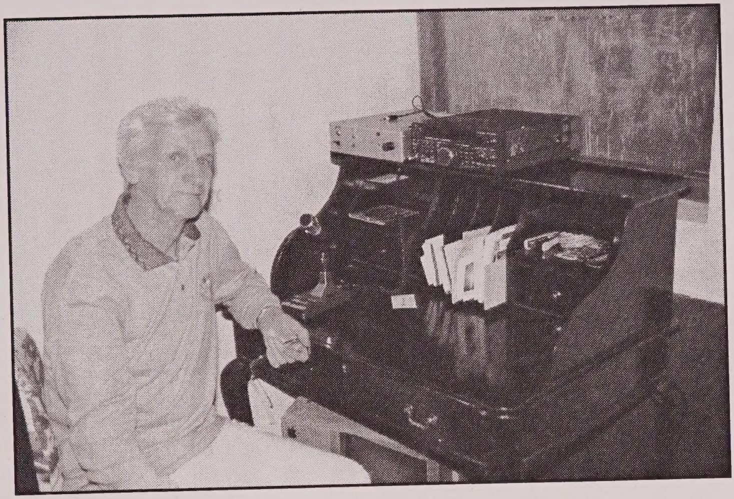
Roadside fruit stall, New Delhi. Mouth watering!



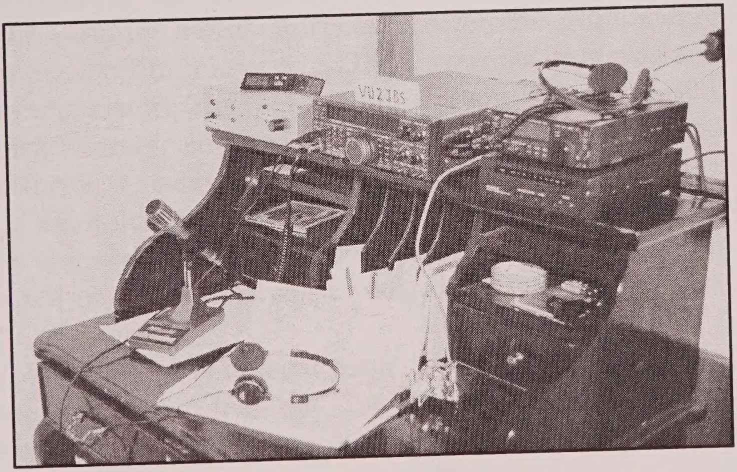
Road-side groceries stall.

No Smoking
RECEPTION
OPEN
SABA BRASS
RESERVED
NIGHT
TOILET

Plastic sign maker in down town New Delhi.



Assembling my VU2JBS station, New Delhi.



Complete VU2JBS station, New Delhi.

Chapter 30

DXPEDITION TO THE SANTA CRUZ GROUP

Temotu Province, Solomon Islands, H40AB

In early 1998, changes to the ARRL DXCC Rules for Country Criteria were released by the ARRL. These changes were to become effective from 1st April 1998 and were of immediate interest to all DXers.

Although many of the changes were ‘cosmetic’, three important parts were of great consequence. One was the definition of the size of an island which would qualify for DXCC county status purposes. After the qualification of tiny Scarborough Reef as a DXCC country, this was a major policy decision. The reef was quite literally a group of rocks which barely showed at high tide! In fact, wooden platforms, to carry operator and equipment, had to be used as a toe-hold on each of the rocks used. An easier decision was the idea of political entities which had then made a couple of French Polynesia island groups possibilities for DXCC status.

Yet another was the change in the unit of measurement used to determine the “separation by water” ruling between two areas. The unit was changed from the mile to the km and in the conversion, 225 miles became 350 kms (instead of the old 362 kms), and this had the effect of reducing that old distance requirement by a small factor. It was this factor that raised the possibility of the Santa Cruz group of the Solomon Islands becoming a new DXCC Country. The group had failed the distance test by the narrow margin of 12 kms many years previously. In those days (P29JS) I worked in the P.N.G. region and in fact held a Solomon Island license, first with the callsign VR4BJ and then, on the Solomon's gaining independence, H44BJ. I had visited the Solomon Islands on a regular basis whilst based in Port Moresby.

The Santa Cruz Group is over 350 kms from Guadalcanal and it seemed to me that it was scheduled to qualify as a new DXCC Country. The largest island in the group is Nendo, which is also the nearest point to the parent country. The capital is Lata and there is a small grass air strip in the immediate area, which is served by air from Honiara (Guadalcanal) two or three times a week. The arrival and departure of the Twin Otter plane is always well attended, since in such a small community most people know each other. The changes to DXCC rules were to become effective on the 1st April 1998. Was it an April fool's joke?

DXer Martti Laine, OH2BH, and a group of other well-know DXers chose to operate from Lata with the callsign H40AA. The Santa Cruz Group is known better locally these days as the Temotu Province and has its own provincial government.

In making the decision to activate this possible new DXCC country, I approached the Spectrum Management Agency Division, Honiara. The agency had recently come under the wing of the Ministry of Transport, Works and Utilities. After an initial telephone call, the basic licensing requirements were carried out by fax. As an example, Spectrum Management faxed the required application forms for Temporary Amateur Radio Licenses. Use of our home calls/H44 was agreed to since Australia and the Solomon Islands had reciprocal licensing agreements.

Of most importance was the requirement to issue licenses in the newly assigned H40 callsign block for Temotu Province. Spectrum Management was very efficient and completed licensing formalities by Fax for Kirsti and me. The licenses, on payment of the license fee, were due to be picked up on arrival in Honiara.

The reason for my choosing Pigeon Island, Temotu Province, was fairly straightforward - I knew the area and it made no sense for two groups to operate from Lata, the capital of Temotu. In IOTA terms, Pigeon Island is part of the Reef Group and numbered OC-065. I needed this, and the IOTA rules allowed me to claim OC-065 if I activated any island in the Reef group.

The Reef Island Group consists of several islands lying about 75kms NNE from Lata (Nendo) Island. The trip means a three hour small-powered boat journey across open water and the canoes used are ribbed 6.5 m (20 feet) fibre glass hulls driven by an onboard motor. The canoe trip is quite an experience and may not be for the weak or squeamish, or one prone to being seasick. The trip over to Pigeon Island was fine, but the return trip a couple of weeks later was a memorable one!

As dusk fell, we arrived at Pigeon Island and I had a couple of clear days before the important 1st April when I could use my new H40AB callsign. By the time I had unloaded my 85 kg of baggage, which included my radio equipment, and got settled in. It was already dark with no hope of erecting my antenna. The generator was running, giving me light and power in my accommodation unit, so I unpacked my Kenwood TS 690S rig, ICOM 706 MKII, Kenwood 13.8V Power Supply Unit and took the lid off the antenna box which carried my Vertical. Finally, I made a quick switch on to check that the rig was okay. The TS 690S and Keyer were both in good shape, none the worse for the trip from Norfolk Island. I then unpacked the Yaesu FL 2100Z Linear Amplifier, fitted the two 572B tubes and put the cover back on. Then I 'called it quits' for the night.

It must be explained that my TS 690S is powered via a home brew power supply unit which also houses a commercial ICOM PS35 switched mode, 13.8 V DC power supply plus an electronic keyer board. The Kenwood rigs were notorious for lack of an on board electronic keying arrangement; this unit took care of the 13.8 V plus an electronic keyer.

Whilst I was in India operating as VU2JBS the unit often had an erratic start-up and I had put it down to low AC input. However, to be safe, in Brisbane I had purchased a back-up ICOM PS35 switched mode power supply unit, so I felt confident. If the unit decided to quit, then I had a fix; a quick change over of the unit in my home brew unit. I had decided to leave my much more reliable heavy duty Kenwood PS 52 DC power supply in my hotel in Brisbane, in the charge of the hotel. This was a concession made at the last moment due to the severe weight restrictions on flights within the Solomon Islands. I would pick the unit up on the way back home.

Next morning, after breakfast, I proceeded to complete the station set-up and tidy the operating position. The generator (for my own use) had been moved to be nearer to the operating position for easier refuelling. I soon erected my trusty Butternut HF-6V multiband vertical antenna and I was now ready to make a start. I would be using the callsign H44/VK9NS initially and change to the new H40AB callsign on the 1st April. I would bring the YAESU FL 2100Z linear amplifier into use a little later.

However, on switching on, I heard a sharp crack from the power supply unit and then nothing. I had that horrible sinking feeling and diagnosed (incorrectly as it turned out) that the cause of the intermittent starting of that power supply had finally come to light. No major problem. I quickly went to work and I soon had my back up power supply fitted and ready to go. This time, on switching on, the bang seemed bigger and again silence reigned. I was now in real trouble, with no means of getting 13.8 V for the rig.

I won't bother you too much with the grisly details, but I now made several checks. Specifically, after all the interconnecting leads had been checked for shorts, my attention was drawn to the AC power. On measurement I found that the AC line was pushing out an incredible 320 VAC. I simply did not believe my test meter, but later it was proved to be correct. Last night, I had no problems so how come?

The following duly came to light. The previous evening during that initial checking of the rig and basic set up, the AC line used had come from the generator via at least 100 metres of power cable. The volts-drop on the line had saved me from an immediate disaster.

In the morning whilst I had breakfast, to tidy things up the generator had been moved to my station area. A short extension cord had then been fitted and plugged into the accommodation unit's access socket. Any possible volts drop now vanished; hence that 320 AC. Disaster indeed!

On checking the actual engine, I noticed that the throttle had been set to the high output position. On further checking, I was told that the generator had been serviced, ready for my arrival and the throttle position left on High. This was the position used on the Island as that long piece of power cable was used to give AC power for the communal room. There they ran a video recorder for the families in the evening. Naturally, generator noise was kept to a minimum by placing the generator far away from the building.

So now, with the generator literally outside my door, disaster had struck in a couple of ways: excess voltage as a result of an incorrect setting of the throttle, plus no volts-drop on a very short AC power line connection.

For that first night, they had merely moved the cable across to my accommodation and connected it to the input wiring for the room. This was the socket I had used for the previous evening check and that 100m of cable saved me. The generator had one other feature; namely a 12 VDC output for battery charging. It might just be possible to use this output. But, of course, it had also read very high at around 18 VDC on the then existing carburettor setting.

With the generator reset to its more normal position, I had about 245 VAC off-load and about 14 V DC. Close enough. Not bad.

Mentally, I had no immediate fix to the power supply dilemma. To put it mildly: "@%$&*#$@!!!!" I was really down in the dumps. No solution was apparent. I needed a 12 V battery to float that 12V DC battery charging line to provide on-line DC regulation and smoothing. I could then, with confidence, wire-up the rig directly to the DC source.

I went to see Diana Hepworth, the owner of the Island and spelt out my predicament. She suggested that I borrow one of their large 12V batteries! What batteries? She took me over to one of the buildings and there, in a cupboard under the Island's radio equipment desk, were two huge 150 AH, 12 V batteries connected in parallel. The Island used solar panels with an occasional full charge from the generator to keep the batteries in shape.

The batteries looked brand new and one of them soon found its way down to my 'shack'. This was a very lucky break. It restarted my brain and gave me time to think and take steps for a future permanent fix. This involved flying over my AC Kenwood power supply from my hotel in Brisbane, Australia. I sent a suitable message to the hotel!

The battery and the generator's 12 V (20 amp) charging outlet and a couple of solar panels (one had to be fixed first) helped me to float-charge the huge battery. The rig worked perfectly and signing H44/VK9NS, I quickly made a start with QSOs going into my log. The bad news with this arrangement was that the generator was very close. I realised that my SSB signal became very distinctive due to pick-up of very loud generator noise. One station became very excited as he told me just how bad my signal sounded. No comment!

On CW, which I now tended to use a bit more, I was also told that my signal had a distinct chirp to it. Well, why not! What do these people expect from a very remote and rare area; perhaps the perfection of Rolls Royce? In those far off days of the 40's, 'chirpy signals' were quite common (due to poor regulation of oscillator HT voltage.) We had the answer then; we sent the signal report with a C at the end, 599C and we knew what was meant. If their signal was really bad, we might even add QLF? As an unofficial addition to the Q code "Are you sending with your left foot?", or words to that effect.

The Yaesu FL 2100Z linear was soon in service using a second AC generator (500W unit) which was fairly new and had excellent regulation. I ran the amplifier at very modest power, but it did allow me to back-off the power requirements of the TS 690S transceiver, so conserving battery power. In this fashion I ran all day with the battery and charger generator and just before dark, I relinquished it to the Islanders. I continued to operate with the battery and that other generator (no charger) for the linear and lights until the battery was too flat to carry on. Meanwhile, the DXpedition routine soon set in, and despite the various challenges, my QSO total really started to build up. But that steadily failing battery voltage at night was a big limitation.

In the meantime, my request for my heavy duty 230 VAC Kenwood PS 52 Power supply to be fetched out of hock in the hotel was being dealt with. This became a copybook transaction. Hotel - Brisbane air freight - Honiara; Honiara - Lata; Rushed through Customs with a large 'MUST GO" Label (Bless you Solomon Island

Airlines!) Then followed the six hour round trip from Pigeon Island to Lata and return by canoe to go and collect the power supply. I'll remember the smile of Deco, the canoe operator, for a long time as he waded through the water and came ashore, carrying my precious power supply on his shoulder. Come to think of it, I also felt pretty happy.

From then on, I was in business and, most of all; the lack of that charger generator noise was a major plus. I had often felt as though my brain was coming apart and I'm not joking. The generator was now moved round to the corner of the accommodation; more out of the way and much quieter.

There is not much to be said about the DXpedition routine; operate, eat, sleep and at various times have to re-fuel both generators. The H40AB station was set up outside under my covered verandah, with super air conditioning - but a pity about the mosquitoes at night!

In the daytime I had a good but restricted view of the water and soon got used to viewing the daily life like local fishing. Seabirds catching their breakfast and other wading birds were a common sight. Pigeon Island does actually have pigeons by the way, two or three varieties of lizards, several species of small parrot and a humming-bird. The land crab is also plentiful as is the coconut crab. There is, of course fish, fish and more fish. This is an area where the very young tuna (about the size of a large sardine) are around in their thousands. The islanders depend on them as a staple food source. They are caught by a net controlled by several villagers who share the catch. This is a daily occurrence.

However, Murphy was feeling grumpy; the FL 2100Z linear amplifier hiccupped and I diagnosed a failed plate parasitic suppressor resistor. My solution was to pinch the 22 ohm grid stoppers and use them to make two identical plate suppressors. I then used 2-100 ohm resistors, from those two defunct ICOM power supplies, as replacement for grid stoppers. For absolute stability, the grids really need 22 ohm resistors, so 100 ohm is not correct. But, despite the glitch, the amplifier kept going.

Pigeon Island is not very large (tiny in fact), but I got around quite a bit, took lots of photographs and quite a bit of video. I joined the Island family for the evening meal around 6:20 pm with light from 'that' generator. My accommodation and the food were excellent. I was eating rice twice a day and a variety of vegetables, meat and fish. Plenty of water laced with lime became a daily requirement and I even had a kerosene fridge running. Handy for cold soft drinks and a few beers bought at the store.

There was a small but busy trading store, serving the needs of Pigeon and outlying islands. The Island also has a school for a dozen pupils, several outbuildings and houses. I purchased all the petrol for the generator from the store; this was hand-pumped into a plastic container. At the time, there was a possibility of higher QSO totals because of the improved band conditions. It is a great feeling to be able to work the 10m band during daytime once again. On both 10m and 12m I had some tremendous openings that helped increase available operating slots and, of course, the number of contacts being made.

I also had the opportunity to use the new ICOM 706 MKII transceiver which I brought as a backup rig. It is a great rig and several stations commented on the excellent audio quality on SSB. Just how did the ICOM design team manage to get all the electronics into such a small package? The transceiver's 'Function' programming is easy to use once one gets used to it. I did not use the rig to drive the FL 2100Z linear as I was not sure if it was a good idea to do so without a proper relay interface to key the linear.

I also tried the rig on the 6m band a couple of times, as the band was reported to be open by several JA stations, but without success. This was almost certainly because of antenna problems. I never did manage to operate on 160m either, because of an antenna restriction. However, my activities on 80m and 40m took up most of my 'low band' time. Perhaps on the next visit!

The station had to be moved inside for the last couple of days due to a big change in the weather conditions. This weather change was still apparent on the morning of my departure for Lata. It was still very much touch and go if we would be able to depart as scheduled. However, a decision was made, and eventually, we were all packed onboard and ready to leave. All my radio equipment was covered under heavy weatherproof sheeting material. We started out and were soon leaving the outskirts of the protecting reef. The water now got noticeably rougher!

I won't bore you with much comment about the actual trip. However, I will say that it was several hours of sheer hell! Please excuse the expression. It was very rough and very unpleasant and I must confess that I thought a wrong decision had been taken. It might have been better if we had stayed on Pigeon Island. It felt like a lifetime, likely to end any time, but we gradually approached the shelter of one of the larger islands. The rest of the journey including the landing jetty at Lata became smoother.

Despite the long and hellish trip, we arrived in good time for me to catch the plane to Honiara. Of course, it also meant that I caught my connecting flight to Brisbane back to the hotel. The next day, I was travelling home to the sanity of Norfolk Island.

It had been a sad farewell for me, as I had really enjoyed this special DXpedition to this tiny Island. It is not often that a new DXCC country is involved, so it made it very special.

Murphy, despite his crusading effort against all DXpeditions, had been foiled once again. Often, life is not meant to be easy, but why pick on ME!

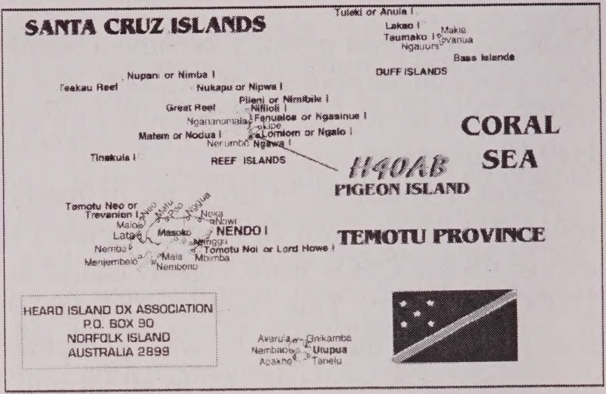
The H40AB DXpedition was dedicated to Ken Stevens;

VK5QW, who had recently become a Silent Key. Ken was a very staunch supporter of HIDXA and I have a strong feeling that he would have been happy with the results of H40AB operation.

Soon, I was free to do a bit of mathematics and my rough log total count of contacts shows that I had made almost 15,800 QSOs from Pigeon Island as H40AB, a new DXCC country. This ball-park total would decrease somewhat by the time it was computerised with any duplicate QSOs removed. All in all though, I felt this was a very satisfactory QSO total with another 800 plus QSOs signing H44/VK9NS, before that important date of 1st April, 1998. The H44/ contacts, of course, counted as a QSO with the Solomon Islands as a country and also as the OC-065 Island group for the IOTA programme.

Shortly afterwards, the Santa Cruz Islands (Temotu Province) officially become a new DXCC country. For the IOTA Hunters who made the QSO with either of my calls, they now had OC-065 (Reef Islands) in the log, another island to claim, in addition to a new country for their DXCC.

Thanks are due to many, especially HIDXA members and in particular, to Kirsti, VK9NL. Kirsti should have been with me, but fell a couple of days before departure and her knee was badly bruised, so it was better that she stayed at home, in case of infection or complications. In hindsight, it was a wise move as the Reef Islands is no place for medical problems with its lack of medical facilities.

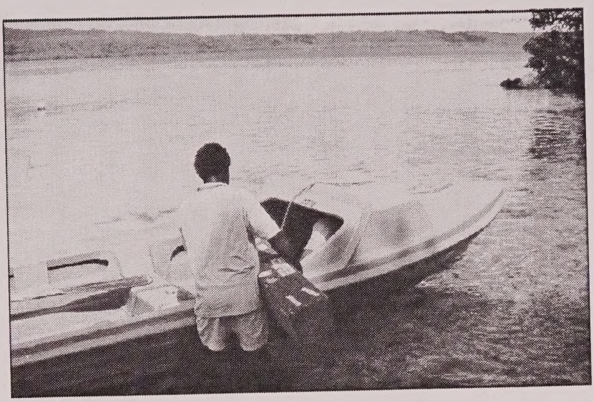

SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS
Tuleki or Anula I
Lakao I
Taumako I
Makia
Vanua
Ngauuni
Bass Islands
DUFF ISLANDS
Nupani or Nimba I
Teakau Reef
Nukapu or Nipwa I
Pileni or Nimbile I
Great Reef
Nifiloli I
Ngananomala
Fenualoa or Ngasinue I
Lipe
Matem or Nodua I
Lomlom or Ngalo I
Nerumbo
Ngawa I
Tinakula I
REEF ISLANDS
H40AB
PIGEON ISLAND
CORAL
SEA
Tomotu Neo or
Trevanion I
Malo
Latau
Masoko
Noka
Nowi
NENDO I
Nemba
Nanggu
Tomotu Noi or Lord Howe I
Menjembalo
Mala
Mbimba
Nembono
TEMOTU PROVINCE
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 90
NORFOLK ISLAND
AUSTRALIA 2899
Avarua
Gnikamba
Nembao
Utupua
Apakho
Tanelu

Back of H40AB QSL cards showing Pigeon Island.

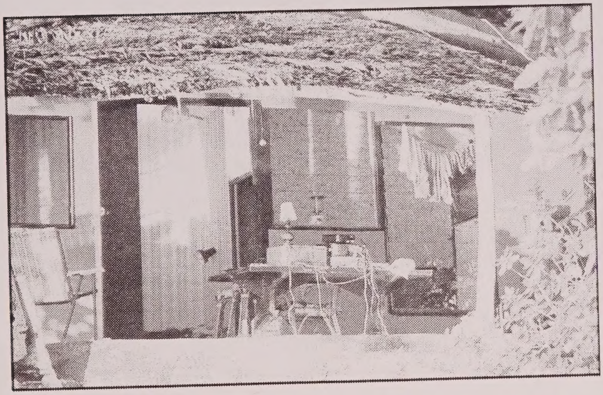
Solomons
H4-FNT

Unloading luggage, off plane from Honiara..

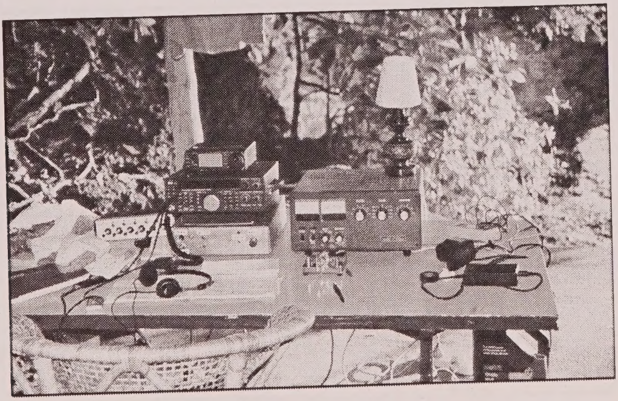
My Luggage, ready for the trip to Pigeon Island.



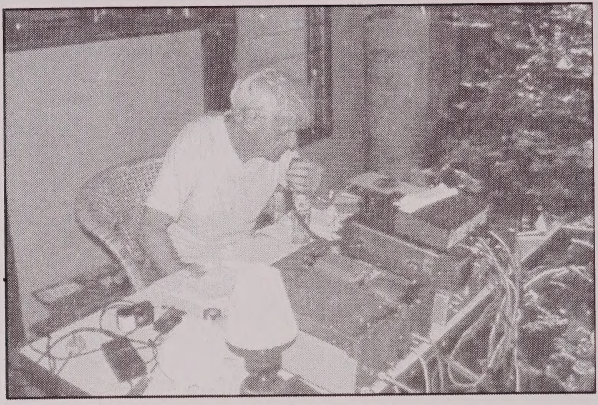
Getting ready to leave Lata for trip to Pigeon Island.



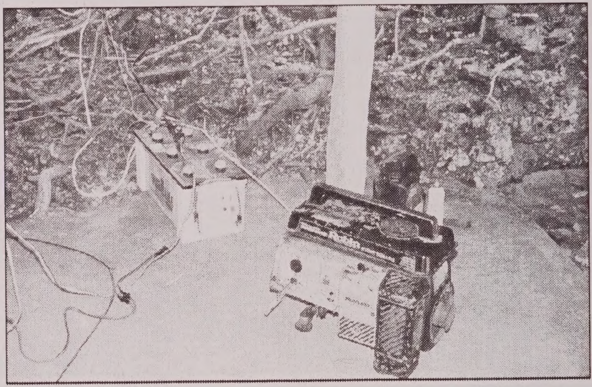
View of the back of my accommodation and shack.



Operating position, Jim, H40AB on Pigeon Island.

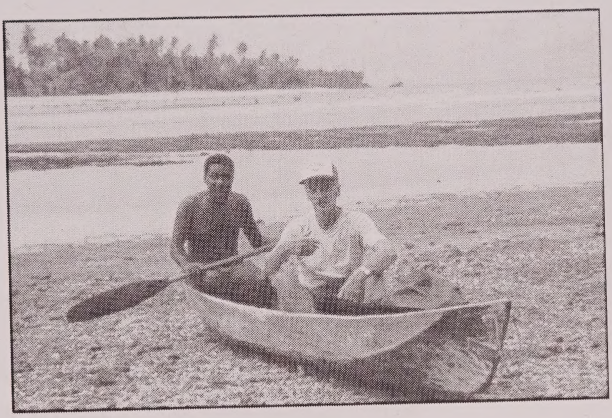


Jim, H40AB operating from Pigeon Island, Temotu.



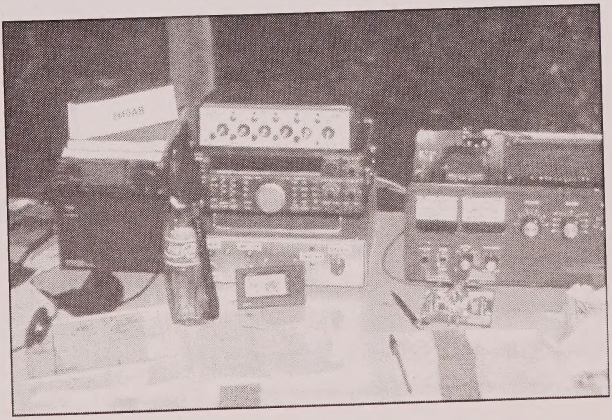
Back up generator and battery, H40AB operation.

Early morning fishing, the catch was shared.



Jim on Pigeon Island, not quite ready to leave.

The old and newer powered canoes of Pigeon Island.



Close up of operating position, H40AB, Pigeon Island.

Chapter 31

AMATEUR RADIO COMES TO THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

A52JS, APRIL 2000

Telecommunications Act 2000

In March 2000, the final part of the Bhutan Telecommunications Act 2000 was put in place. This covered the legislation to permit the introduction of the Amateur Radio Service in Bhutan. Licensing, band allocations, band usage, callsign structure, were now in place. The legislation uses the existing Tourist Visa structure in a special form for visiting radio amateurs and the normal US$ 200/250 (seasonal) daily tourist rate applies.

Early Days

In 1990 I was privileged to receive an invitation (by telegram) to Bhutan for 'Amateur Radio purposes' and in February/March operated from Thimphu, the capital, signing A51JS. The operation was accepted a few weeks later for DXCC credit at ARRL. Many DXers were happy with their QSO, as Bhutan, in spite of the earlier activities of Pradhan, A51PN, was still a very rare DXCC country in those days.

A Future for Amateur Radio?

That 1990 visit to Bhutan had and still has a profound effect on me. This magnificent country with a Monarchy in place and a solid independent style government had no provisions for the Amateur Radio service. During my extensive travels in Bhutan, I saw an effective point-to-point HF station network handling the internal traffic of the country. The station operators were proficient CW operators (with SSB skills) and managed their stations on a daily basis - an ideal experience for future licensed A5 radio amateurs.

Through my rose-coloured spectacles I saw the problem as one of assisting with Amateur Radio equipment, with the provision of the outlines of an Amateur Radio exam package as a possible guideline to get things started. I had become familiar with the subject, having taught the UK RAE syllabus for many years to future radio amateurs. It turned out to be a simplistic view and was to occupy my thoughts for many months or should that be years?

Bhutan 1999

I must back track for a moment to October 1999. Two weeks after the RSGB HF Convention, I left Heathrow, London, on my way home to Norfolk Island. En route, I visited Bhutan by invitation and as usual, was carrying the usual 80 kg of Amateur Radio equipment. In particular, a Kenwood TS 690S, (with built in antenna tuner), a 13.8V DC switched mode power supply, a Butternut HF-6V Multi-band vertical, coaxial cable, wire and log book. This was to be the basics of the station for Yonten, A51TY, ready for that forthcoming legislation! I arrived as scheduled at Paro Airport, which is the main entry point to Bhutan.

With the assistance of Yonten I cleared customs quickly and we were soon on our way to Thimphu via that long climbing, winding road.

Yonten, A51TY Station, set up in (1999)

In discussion at MOC, no objections were raised to the idea of setting up a station for Yonten; later, the equipment was registered at MOC. Over a few days, we set up the rig, built a 20m dipole and assembled the HF-6V vertical into two completed parts, ready for quick assembly and future use. No transmissions were made, but 20m sounded great and over the next few days we both listened around. Yonten was given an almost 'crash' course on the use of the TS 690S and was given some idea of the general activity on the various bands. He was also able to check his CW ability with a key, using the 'side tone' of the TS 690S (no actual transmissions) and he had not lost his skill! This would be a major plus for the future.

Back on Norfolk Island

After my visit, I returned to Norfolk Island with a 'Draft Copy' of the Bhutan Telecommunications Act and the task of writing further material which had been suggested as guidelines for amendments. I faxed the various papers, with changes, direct to MOC/BTA a few weeks later. In early January 2000, two invitation visas to Bhutan were issued for me and my wife Kirsti, VK9NL. With those visas in place, we had both lodged formal licensing applications and requested the callsigns of A52JS and A52NL with the Bhutan Telecommunications Authority (BTA). We knew that we could be in Bhutan at the drop of a hat, or the passing of that vital piece of legislation! The Amateur Radio section of the legislation was accepted (on schedule) and I telephoned Deputy Minister, Dasho Leki Dorji of the Ministry of Communications, (MOC) giving him my congratulations and the promise of a bottle of champagne in celebration when we next met in Thimphu. It seemed at the time it would be just a matter of weeks.

April 1 DX Release A5, DXpedition

On the 1st April a DX Release on plans for a major U.S. led DXpedition to A5, Bhutan, appeared in various international DX outlets which caught me off balance. The release carried not a single word acknowledging what had been achieved by MOC. Nothing at all was mentioned about the work of HIDXA and its involvement with assistance in enabling Amateur Radio in Bhutan. It was if I and HIDXA had been declared invisible.

After considerable deliberation, I made a direct telephone call to Deputy Communications Minister, Dasho Leki of MOC and another to MOC/BTA. As a result of these calls, we felt free to travel to Bhutan immediately, as our callsigns of A52JS and A52NL were now assured by BTA and in addition, Yonten would also be licensed as A51TY; his old callsign. These licenses would be renewable on an annual basis. Several other administrative matters were cleared by fax to ensure that everything would be available on arrival.

Kirsti, VK9NL Bows Out

My problems, however, were not over. Kirsti, VK9NL, refused to go to Bhutan. She had made a decision (in light of that A5 DXpedition Release) to opt out from the ARRL DXCC programme with immediate effect – and this from a well known amateur, currently at Number 1 Honor Roll at DXCC (her total also included P5, North Korea).

Her own perception was that DXpeditioning had sunk to a new low. She had been privy to what had happened during the previous couple of months.

I was very tempted to follow her example but then thought about all the work that had been done by MOC to bring the Amateur Radio service to Bhutan. I decided to go as planned and get to Bhutan as quickly as possible.

A51TY and A52JS Authorisation Issued

A few days later, around noon, I arrived at Paro Airport with some 80 kg of luggage. The plane was on schedule; it was mid-day on Wednesday the 26th April. I carried an ICOM 756, a couple of lengths of coaxial cable, Bencher paddle, headset/microphone, vertical antenna and wire. I also brought my heavy duty AC Kenwood 13.8V DC Power Supply. I was taking no more chances with those switched mode supplies.

I was met at Paro airport by Dasho Yonten and quickly cleared through customs. We headed for Thimphu, a couple of hours drive away. Yonten and I visited MOC and BTA later that afternoon and by 9 o'clock the next morning, as promised, both of our authorisation certificates for A51TY and A52JS were available. In the case of Yonten, A51TY, this license was valid for one year and renewable on demand.

As a nice touch, the Director of BTA, Thinly Dorji, personally presented our certificates and they are things of beauty. Some ten years after my first visit to Bhutan down that A5 track, the reality of what had been achieved by MOC/BTA in Bhutan had struck home. These two Amateur Radio authorisations (licenses) were, in fact, the first to be actually used as a result of that 2000 Bhutan Telecom Legislation.

It was a special moment for Yonten, A51TY, and my own view was that it was important that a Bhutanese national should be the first to benefit. He is our link with past Amateur Radio activity in A5 Bhutan, and 30 years ago A51TY was a well known callsign with a wide circle of international Amateur Radio friends. In my own case, it was also a wonderful moment, as 10 years had passed by in front of my eyes.

I was delighted with the final outcome of all the effort and work.

Yonten, A51TY, on the Air

Yonten and I headed back to his home where the Kenwood TS 690S (left on my last visit) was connected up and 'fired up' in earnest. Needless to say, there was a hiccup - this time with AC power. Murphy was at work as usual. An hour later, everything was ready; the automatic TS 690S in-built tuner unit had tuned-up the dipole on 20m and Yonten, A51TY, was in business. For the first ever QSO under the new legislation, a loud CW station, RW0JR, Pavel, calling CQ was chosen. Yonten replied to him, using A51TY. A solid, old-fashioned CW QSO resulted; report, name, QTH, rig, antenna and queries from Pavel, where is Thimphu, what is A51??? A moment later, all hell let loose!!!

Yonten moved up to 14222 to make his first SSB QSO with Kirsti, VK9NL; this was a tough and marginal QSO as a result of QRM from the huge pile-up.

This same pile-up caught Yonten off guard and I asked him to say, "Go ahead the VU station." In replying, Ram, VU2BK, said in perfect English "How nice to hear you back on the air again, Yonten, after all these years. Is must be at least 30 years since we last spoke?" In all honesty, 'it made my day' as the saying goes; what a wonderful coincidence, chance, call it what you will, even turn-up for the books! Yonten was grinning from ear to ear. He had been remembered after all those years of silence! A solid QSO followed and another of my dreams had at last been realised; Amateur Radio for the Bhutanese was now in place! Too often, foreigners operate from a country with no sign of a national on air.

Later, I made several CW and SSB QSOs from Yonten's house, using A52JS and my own IC 756 rig. I must also comment that I was made very welcome and comfortable by his family during my stay. Having met them all previously it was nice to be with his family again.

A52JS Fires up From Paro

For two reasons, it was time for me to move to Paro. In the first place, that mysterious A52A operation would start up in a few days and I would be operating from across the street! I had no desire to be QRMed off any band once they opened up. Secondly I knew Paro to be the better radio location, based on my earlier experience as A51JS in Thimphu.

Several hours later, including the two hour drive to Paro, I had A52JS station set up, ready to start on the inevitable pile-ups. Here I should explain that I operated from two locations in Paro, both close to each other. The first few days my activity was based at the Olathang Hotel and later it was from the Gangtey Palace Hotel. The move from the first to the second hotel was the result of the unfortunate death of the hotel manager and his wife in a car accident. This terrible tragic accident resulted in the closing down of Olathang Hotel for several weeks. It had become impossible to run the hotel such was the level of grief within the staff.

I ran my ICOM 756 barefoot and it performing without a glitch. I was seldom short of takers and over the next few days, I logged several thousand QSOs. Meanwhile, the A52A team had arrived in Bhutan and opened up from Thimphu, occupying every available DX slot, regardless! Still, these days with the Packet Cluster system, one is spotted very quickly and a few kHz either way makes no real difference.

Band Conditions

It is remarkable what one is able to do with 100 watts, a reasonable antenna and a good and elevated location. On DXpeditions, as I have mentioned before, I always use my secret weapon, those two hi-tech pieces of plastic called the 'DX Edge'. On occasions, 10m, although wide open, was almost unusable as a result of heavy CB interference. This level of interference from Asian stations has to be heard to be believed. It confirms just how much of this Amateur Radio designated band has been hi-jacked by the CBers. Despite this problem, I made many QSOs on 10m, and 15m was also a fine band with many long openings. I also found 40m CW to be good, but 80m was often noisy. In addition, I operated on all the WARC bands and a page count of my logs showed a final total of some 20,300 A52JS QSOs - a satisfying result.

I often felt tired and had to have a break, take a walk and, best of all, finally take a few moments to say hello to Bhutan; to look over the magnificent Paro valley. The view leaves one breathless and not only because of the 2,000m altitude. It was time to stop and reflect for a moment on this superb country.

A51TY in Thimphu

Meanwhile, in Thimphu, Yonten, A51TY, had also been busy making QSOs and we had a couple of skeds on 20m SSB. In the future, it is hoped that Yonten will get more organised and acquire further equipment in the form of a beam and rotator. This would improve his signal and also provide some needed discrimination from the QRM areas of Thimphu. Yonten would, once again, be able to leave his unique mark on the bands in coming months.

A Visitor Arrives

My No 2 son Stuart (note the 'Asian' touch here) arrived ex Reading, England and joined me in Paro for the last week of my stay. Of course, we all showed him around and my actual operating time dropped. It was special for me to be able to take him to visit my 'extended family' in Punakha. This takes several hours to reach and entails an over-night stopover. We had a wonderful visit to this beautiful area and took several stunning photographs.

Next day, back in Paro, we also had time to visit the Saturday morning market with its wonderful variations in people, food, produce and souvenirs. This market is a real old fashioned gathering of local people tending to the needs of their families. Whilst in Paro, we also went to visit the Archery competitions, usually held every week. In one case, instead of the hi-tech modern 're-entry bow' and crafted metal arrows, it was back to the old traditional bow and arrow of old. In either case, the Bhutanese archers are accurate at around 100m.

The archery competitions are full of fun as the local team plays the rival team who has often travelled from outlying areas. During the contest, each team has plenty to say about the other's lack of skill. Why should they waste time competing with them; and other jibes! It reminded me of the women cricketers of Tokelau. It was special to have Stuart with me, sharing my feelings about Bhutan and meeting my friends. My own four weeks had passed so quickly and for us both, London was our next destination.

The Future of Amateur Radio in A5, Bhutan

The Bhutan Telecommunications Act 2000 has now set the country on the road to looking after its youngsters with provisions for Novice style licensing and getting the school children interested in Amateur Radio. English is the major language at schools and many kids will embrace the idea with open minds and enthusiasm.

In my earlier submissions to the MOC, I had suggested the idea of possible Amateur Radio club activities. In fact, HIDXA had donated several items of radio equipment in the form of transceivers, a linear amplifier and a multi-band beam. It is hoped that school children will be encouraged to learn the 'skills' of communicating. For example, they would using Amateur Radio to contact world Scouts and Guides during their annual Scout Jamboree and annual IOTA event. It is an exciting idea and it will help keep our hobby alive. Many say our hobby is dying on its feet, but in my own view, this is not the case.

I am proud to have been a tiny part of this great story of the start of Amateur Radio in Bhutan. It is now available to all qualified Bhutanese, old and young and also foreigners. That can't be bad.

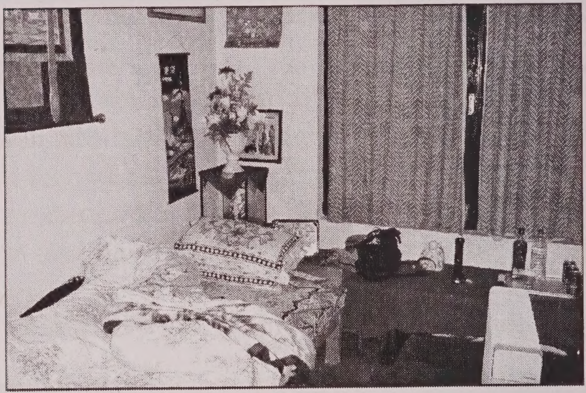
To my extended family in Bhutan, a special 'Thank you', for the fun and having me back in your home!!

Tashi Delek (May your journey be a safe one).

Dashi Leki Dorje, Minister of Communications, Thimphu.

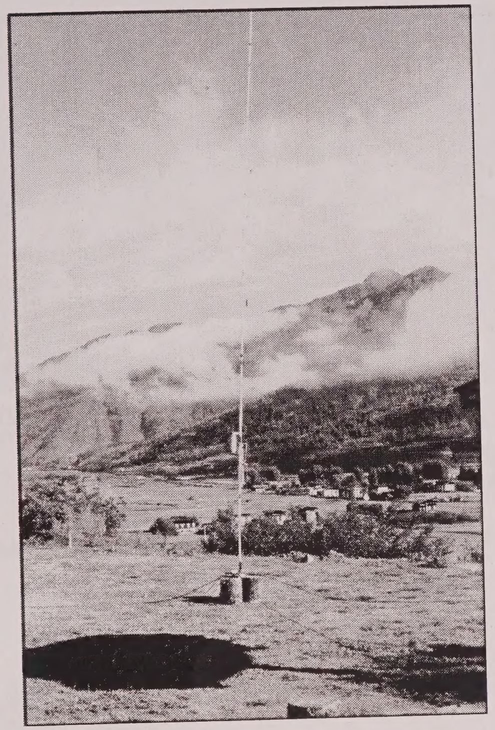
First A51 (TY) and A52 (JS) licences issued in 2000.

Yonten, A51TY and Jim, A52JS – we did it!



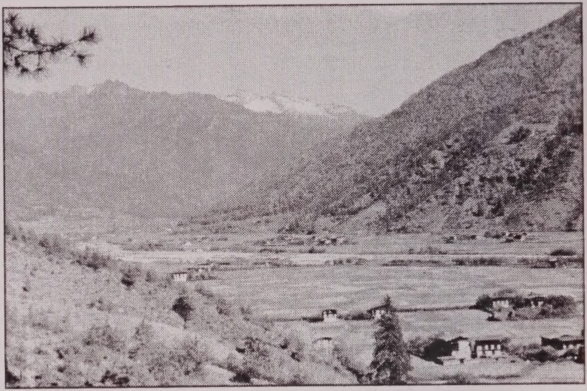
My room (at Yonten's) during my stay in Thimphu.

Hotel in Paro, new site for my A52JS operations.



HF6V overlooking the Paro valley.

Overlooking the Paro Valley, from the A52JS location.



The glorious Paro Valley from the A52JS hotel, Paro.

Yours truly, operating as A52JS, at new Paro location.

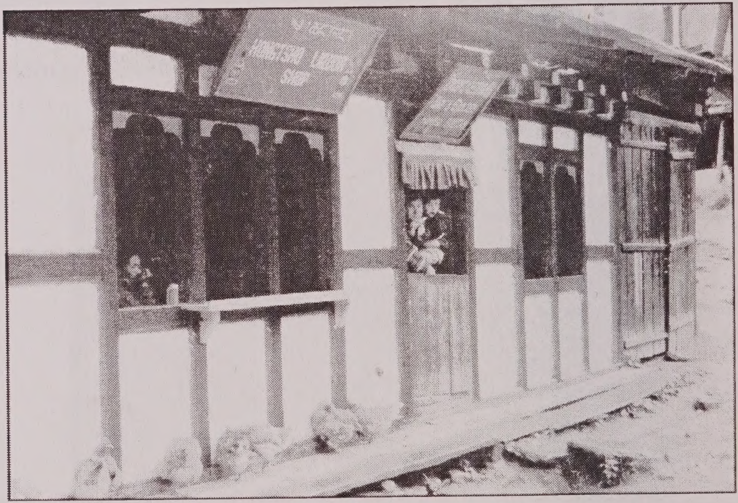
Yonten, A51TY operates from my Paro hotel station.

Jim, A52JS and Yonten, A52TY taking a break.

My son Stuart, Tasi Yonten and Jim, Paro.

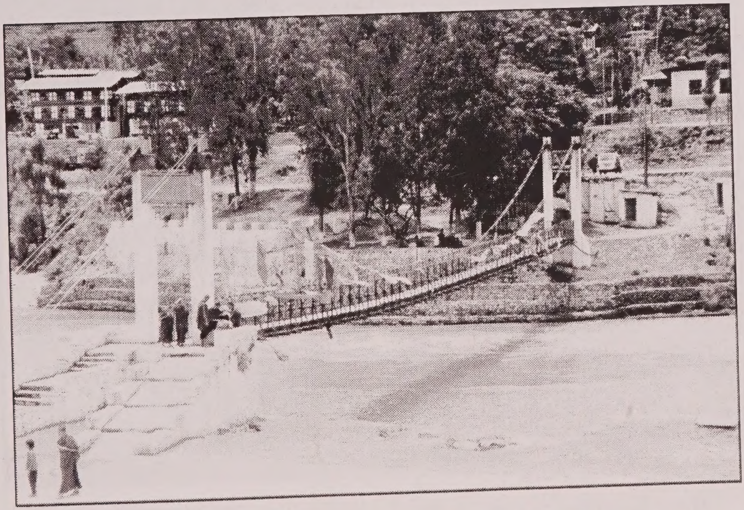
My son Stuart visits Bhutan during my A52JS operation.

Archery in Paro with traditional bow.



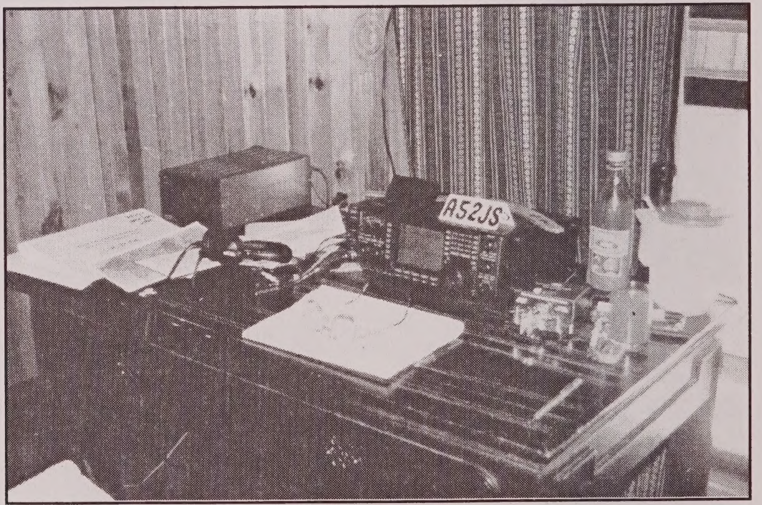
Hongsho liquor store (with Chickens for sale), Paro.

Basket weaving, Paro market, Bhutan.



Bridge over to the Zhong, Bhutan

Bhutan style freight train, a very common sight outside towns.



New location for the A52JS station in a nearby Paro hotel.

Chapter 32

LETTER FROM MACQUARIE ISLAND
March 1985

I have always liked this letter from Graeme; it is wonderfully descriptive of Macquarie Island. In putting together this chapter I noticed that the letter was exactly 20 years old. But, when he had written it, I had known Graeme for at least 7 years.

Dear Jim,

You asked me the other day, to write something about Macquarie Island so here goes.

Where is Macquarie Island? It is half way between Australia and the Antarctic continent about 1000 Miles South of the East Coast of Australia. The Island is 23 Miles long and about 3 Miles wide, running in a North South direction. The exact position is 159 E long and 54 S Lat.

The Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) station is situated on a very narrow isthmus right on the Northern end of the Island. Most of the Island is a plateau roughly 1000ft high, cut by valleys and many fresh water lakes. The plateau falls away to the coast very steeply in the form of tussock grass covered slopes, or cliffs in some places. The outlets for some of the lakes run into short creeks, which tumble over the cliffs in spectacular waterfalls. The coastline is Rocky Headlands, gravel or stony beaches. Rocks close to the shore and around the headlands are covered with large growths of kelp, which is in constant movement due to the normally heavy surf crashing on the shoreline.

The Island is a breeding ground of the birds and animals which inhabit the Southern ocean regions namely; Penguins, Albatrosses and Seals. There are four species of Penguins, the largest being the King Penguin, roughly 2ft 6ins high. These have brilliant patches of orange at the back of the head and on the chest, lay one egg, which is carried on their feet. Next are the Gentoos and Royals, about 18ins high and lastly the Rockhopper. The Rockhoppers and Royals have crests of yellow feathers on their heads. There are an estimated 10 million Penguins breeding on the shores. There are four (4) species of Albatrosses nesting on the cliffs. Largest of all is the Wanderer, with a wingspan up to 6ft. Then there is the light mantled Sooty, the Greyhead and the Blackbrowed. These birds usually nest on the steep cliffs above the beaches. On the beaches are hundreds of elephant seals, of which the bulls can weigh up to 2 tons.

On the Rocky headlands, especially on the Northern end, can be found the Fur Seals which were nearly wiped out by the sealers in the early 1900's. Relics of their activities can still be seen - large boilers where the blubber of the elephant seals was boiled down to oil when no more fur seals were left and large tanks, called digesters, where Penguins were boiled to give off oil.

In 1937 Macquarie Island was declared a National Park and now the populations of all species are returning to normal. There were 22 Fur Seal pups born this year, compared to 12 in 1983. The sealers also introduced cats, rabbits and rats and now there is an extensive program to eradicate these animals introduced by man. The cats are killing some of the nesting birds, the rabbits are causing destruction of the vegetation, which leads to soil erosion.

The weather is usually influenced by the surrounding ocean, so it never gets too cold and then never too hot either. Temperatures range from -4C in winter to +1OC in summer, although just before Christmas we had a record 14.4 C. As we are located past the roaring forties in the filthy fifties, it's usually pretty windy and not too much sunshine gets through the overlaying layer of cloud. We also get a fair amount of misty rain which keeps the vegetation quite green.

There will be 21 of us spending the year here, which comprise tradesmen, weather observers, scientists, radio operators and techs, (me), a doctor, cook, some biologists and of course the boss. The station is quite comfortable as each person has a room to themselves, which although small, is quite adequate. We all eat together in a common dining room/lounge bar and have separate areas for watching video tapes, playing pool, having a sauna and volley ball is played in our large store.

I also look after the greenhouses, which gives us salad every day. We're growing lettuce, tomato, spring onions, cucumbers, capsicum, spinach, radish and a few herbs.

There is a good library, with about 100 new films, many others are very ancient ones, about 200 video tapes so plenty of things to keep people occupied in their off duty hours. Photography is also very popular - we have 2 darkrooms so people can develop films and print colour and black and white prints.

I also can spend a few evenings on my ham radio set, keeping in contact with friends and talking to other operators all over the world.

The chartered ship "*Icebird*" will be here soon to drop off more supplies and will pick up this mail, the last I will be able to send out, as the next ship will be the one which comes in October, bringing our replacements and taking us home to Australia. However, we will be getting 3 mail drops, courtesy of the Roya1 Australian Air Force 36 Squadron, who fly large Hercules C-130 aircraft down from Australia and drop parachutes of food, like milk, fresh fruit and vegetables and urgently needed spare parts.

There are six huts scattered around the Island at various points of interest so we can take off from the base and backpack around the Island spending a few days at each place. The complete round trip is about 55 miles, usually taking about 10 to 12 days.

The Huts are well fitted out with food, heaters, bunks and a radio transceiver for communicating with the main base to let them know you're OK.

So I hope to hear from you, have a happy 1985 and think of me down here on this remote little Island now and again.

73,

Graeme Currie, VK0GC

Graeme had previously been working in the Antarctic regions for many years. He had started in 1960 with a season at Mawson Base. He then spent a couple of years at Wilkes Base in the mid 60's and later in 1977. He went to Casey Base in 1969 and later again, in 1974. In 1979 he joined the research vessel *Hero* as a radio technician (then sailing between Argentina, Chile and the Antarctic Peninsula) signing KC4AAB/MM. In 1981 he spent a year at the South Pole, with access to the station KC4AAA. Then followed his three years at Macquarie in 1983, 1985 and 1987, where he was the radio technician looking after the communication equipment for the ANARE station.

Graeme was one of the ANARE 'regulars' working on the Island and as a radio amateur he was consistently active. Many DXers would have him in their logs, but there was always a problem with QSLing. I think it was a general thing amongst the VK0 stations. They had been away from home for a year and coming home to maybe hundreds of QSL cards was a bit of a turnoff.

It was shortly after some regular skeds from Norfolk Island with Graeme that I offered to do his QSLing. I could readily contact him at will. Either way on the air, telephone, or by telex his log details were readily available. It was an ideal arrangement for the DXers needing this rare confirmation card. It is a worst nightmare scenario – being a QSL manager with no DX station logs!!

In Graeme's case I have nothing but praise for him and his log keeping. I always received the logs on a weekly basis and by the time a request for a VK0GC QSL card arrived in my PO Box, I was in a position to reply.

Even today, in 2007, I still get the odd request. I can take the VK0GC log material off the shelf (where it is all carefully stored) and within minutes can be writing a QSL card. I have occasionally thought about entering Graeme's logs into computer format. However, his logs are already typed and very easy to deal with.

I suppose having been to Heard Island, Kirsti and I (as radio amateurs) have taken a certain position with ANARE. 'WE', have been there and done that – as they say. Over those many years, Graeme has given the DXers a chance at this rare VK0 location. I was to finally meet Graeme in person at ANARE, Hobart in 1982, just prior to Heard Island. He had been very interested in the idea of coming with us; he would have been a real asset.

Over the last 25 years or so HIDXA has helped with VK0 QSL cards and the QSLing for:

VK0DS	Doug Speedie	Macquarie Island
VK0JR	John F. Rich	Macquarie Island
AX0NE	Graeme McDiarmid	Macquarie Island
VK0NE	Graeme McDiarmid	Macquarie Island
VK0DA	Frank O'Rouke	Heard Island
VK0DA	Frank O'Rouke	Davis Base
VK0WH	Warren Hull	Macquarie Island

The logs for these stations were always available very quickly. Even with Heard Island on a sked, I could clear up a few dozen cards with Frank, VK0DA. With the cards pre-sorted, date and time, it was easy for Frank to check his log. With the signal report and confirmation of the band, I could write a QSL card. Another DXer was happy, as the Macquarie Island QSL card dropped through his or her letter box – the round trip had only taken three weeks.

These days, as I write this, 'things, they are a changing' (thanks Bob) as ANARE changes its stance slightly by looking west to the southern ocean and the area around Heard Island. Macquarie Island has been used for years and in scientific terms, has virtually given up all its secrets.

With global warming a reality, ANARE now feels that valuable scientific data can be better acquired from Heard Island. The southern ocean and its gigantic heat sink capabilities is a treasure trove of scientific knowledge. If Heard Island were to become a major scientific base (like the long standing French Base of Kerguelen Island) then the scientists will surely add to their knowledge of this vast area.

If it happens, (I would bet a racing certainty) then it will have been 60 years since ANARE abandoned Heard Island. Then, it felt that Antarctic bases, like Mawson, Casey, could provide all that was required in the scientific areas.

If Heard Island is resurrected as the major ANARE base it will be with hi-tech housing and infrastructure together with instant online communications. Just maybe, this decision will be a winner; there are many things to be clarified in terms of the effects of global warming.

As Macquarie Island now goes into decline, serving as a fully automatic weather station, we must remember that it served ANARE well. The Island is a closed shop, and it is virtually impossible to get permission even for any well-meaning group to visit and stay for a few days. In my opinion this is a great pity; I would certainly have tried hard to get permission.

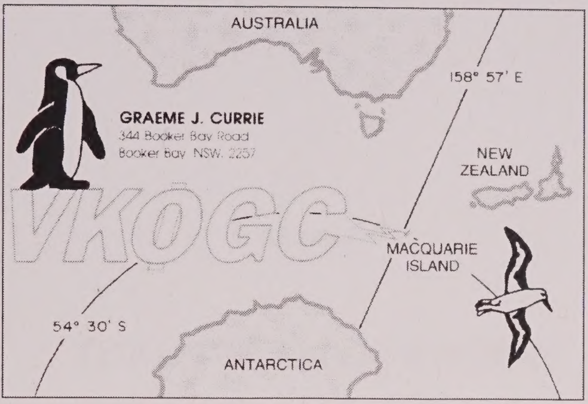
Large colony of King penguins, Macquarie Island.

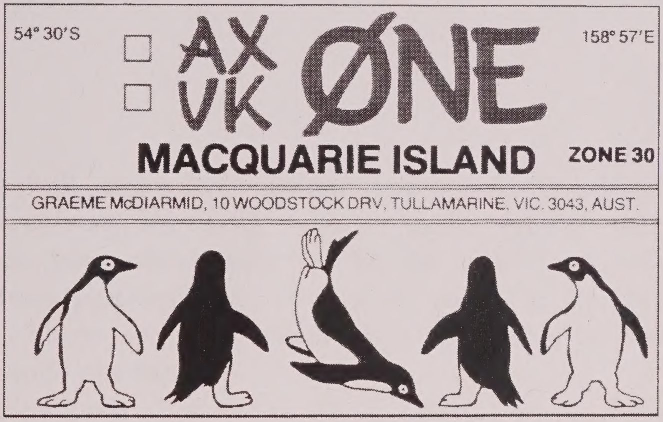
A sea of the Rock-hopper penguins, Macquarie Island.

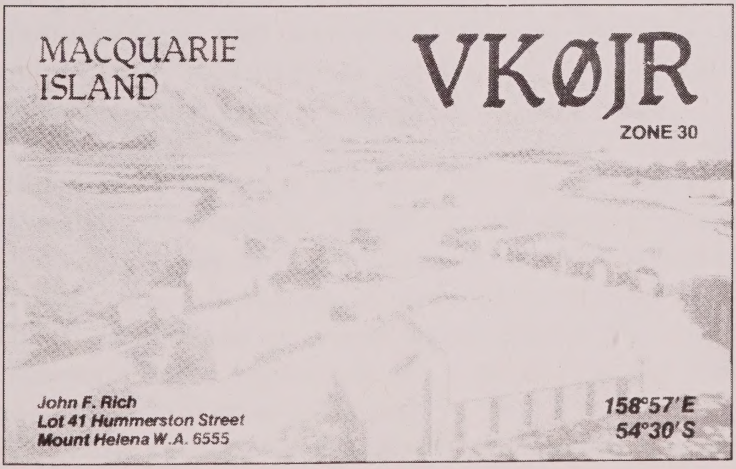
Warren Hull, VK0WH, ANARE base in the background.

BEYOND THE EXTREME

Warren. VK0WH, Macquarie Island.


AUSTRALIA
GRAEME J. CURRIE
344 Booker Bay Road
Booker Bay NSW 2257
VK0GC
158° 57' E
NEW ZEALAND
MACQUARIE ISLAND
54° 30' S
ANTARCTICA


54° 30'S
☐ AX
☐ VK
0NE
158° 57'E
MACQUARIE ISLAND
ZONE 30
GRAEME McDIARMID, 10 WOODSTOCK DRV, TULLAMARINE, VIC. 3043, AUST.


MACQUARIE ISLAND
VK0JR
ZONE 30
John F. Rich
Lot 41 Hummerston Street
Mount Helena W.A. 6555
158°57'E
54°30'S

Chapter 33

THE OTHER MAN'S HOBBY

Many will know of a simple analogy to the lengths of man's activity on earth. Relative to the eons of time, our stay is very short indeed. In the world of antiques, furniture, paintings, etc, time is measured in hundreds of years. There are many signs of civilisation measured in thousands of years.

When we look at the world of radio, then our limits are quickly defined. All of those interested in electronics and communications will know of Marconi, Faraday and Fleming. Many will have an outline of how it all started, even if one's ideas have to change from time to time.

One thing is certain; the sheer acceleration from these rudimentary beginnings of a few tens of decades ago is spectacular. In today's world of electronics, changes happen almost day to day. No sooner does one buy this or that black box (all singing all dancing, of course) than it becomes superseded by a new, better model. The changes in Amateur Radio equipment are a good example, where models come and go *ad infinitum.*

The radio enthusiasts of today have a lot going for them;

the integrated circuit performs multiple tasks which would have required hours of 'discrete component' labour and boards full of components. Dare I suggest that the days of old were more fun? With a little bit of application and effort, one could cheerfully find one's way through a typical superhet. With a bit of thought, one could explain the stages of a typical 5 band amateur transmitter.

With the advent of SSB in the early fifties, things became a bit more difficult. One needed just a bit more expertise to come to grips with phase shift networks, sideband switching, crystal filters and the mechanical filter, etc. Ideas on Linear Amplifiers were not always clear. Intermodulation distortion, over-driving and that dreaded word the 'decibel' raised their heads.

My own involvement in ham radio started in the late forties. In those days 'home brewing' was the way to go. For those of you not around at the time, the world was a gigantic post-war surplus store. At the right place and the right time, you could buy whatever you wanted - even guns, aircraft, tanks, ships, etc. However, it was for the radio enthusiast that the lode of El Dorado was suddenly opened. Millions of radio valves, capacitors, resistors and other components were now readily available. Thousands of complete transmitters, receivers, panels and units were just down the road or at the end of the mail system. Amateur ingenuity really thrived. There were thousands of words written on modifications to this or that ex military unit for civilian use.

In the case of the Dakota airplane (apart from it being the world beater it was), it had aboard a set of radio equipment which even today makes me feel alive. The Command Series of three matching transmitters and receivers were superb. They were engineering masterpieces along the traditions of Rolls Royce standards. At the time, it seemed they would be around forever. Long after the heyday, these units were being stripped for parts. Many articles had in the parts list this or that item from this or that surplus equipment. There seemed to be no end to the uses for the bits and pieces.

However, just 30/40 years on, one would find it hard to find these units complete. They are around, but will be in a private collection, a museum, etc. Most of it has now long gone; such is the continuance of our 'use and throw away society'.

It was with this background that a visit to the States brought me into touch with Ralph, W6SPQ. He is a radio amateur with a difference, he collects Radio Antiques. In comparison with the age of the Sphinx, a Rembrandt painting, etc, our ideas of antiquity are ludicrous. Yet, already, many of these earlier pre-war radio items are very hard to find and are becoming rarer with each passing decade.

Ralph's interest is in old and rare equipment and, in addition, he is interested in restoration of these items. To refurbish an old radio takes time and dedication. At worst they will only be around 60 years old. In many cases much younger. A lost control knob must be replaced with exactly the right item. It may take years of collecting and sorting to complete one particular job. As Ralph says, one develops an obsession and a memory which scans every junk box seen. He looks at every junk radio brought in or sighted at some 'flea market' looking for - what?? Probably some knob, component board or component to complete that latest project X.

Among the laws usually governing such things, input of parts and units is faster than shelves can be built. When that law is overcome, it will be that other law about wall space, which will come into place. In any case, there will be always a heap of unsorted items which, of course, is covered by another law. In this heap, will be the item one is looking for!

Like all people with a real interest in their hobby, Ralph's enthusiasm is catching. Many of us have memories of these older domestic radios. They seem to be remembered as things of beauty and items of furniture. Glorious cabinets in selected hard wood carefully polished. Even as assembly-line methods took over (using veneered plywood) they still looked pretty good. It seemed that they were built to last, as indeed they were of course, until nasty old technology came along and in due course they were replaced by something perceived to be better. This time, the 'something better' was plastic and so it goes.

The important thing was that these radios were the centre of the home. Just like television today, families gathered around to listen to the news, Henry Hall's guest night, some special comedy or drama series.

In looking inside one of these very early masterpieces, 'the shortest distance between two points is a straight line' seemed never to have been a requirement. Instead, wires went from A to B in a series of immaculate right angles. The wire gauge used was substantial – even overkill. It had to be, since it was usually self supporting. If, in the unfortunate event, two wires had to cross each other, then this was done neatly at the regulation distance apart. Lavish use was made of copper and brass screws and nuts, solid panels and baseboards. No doubt about it, love and care is there for all to see.

Even then, there is a mystery about it all, even if one might be a technical wizard. Only those who have experienced the magic of the crystal set will know what I mean - even if, instead of the classic cat's whisker, you cheated a little and used an 'off the shelf' germanium diode. Those first signals heard are never forgotten. Add the complexity of band switching, a bit of amplification and a bit of super-regeneration, and it is magic to be sure. Who of you remember the first valve acquired and how much pocket money, or wheeling and dealing it took to actually get it?

These days, a fault on one's multi-mode Japanese transceiver results in a 'pit of the stomach feeling' as one takes the lid off. Inside, it is a nightmare of small components, transistors and ICs; life is no longer easy, no matter how enthusiastic you are, the technicalities of it all are hard to keep up with.

Let us think of Ralph and his wonderful collection of earlier radio and communication equipment. Consider the hours of dedication and effort to bring his collection to such a high standard - the hours of searching for that elusive part for that incomplete unit. Talking to Ralph, he has some amazing stories of his lucky finds. Radios still lay in unopened boxes from some old warehouse due to be pulled down. However, the majority of it all is hard work and application.

It was nice of Ralph to share with me his enthusiasm. He will leave a tremendous legacy to the kids of tomorrow. Let us hope they will get as much fun as we have had from this hobby of ours.

NB: This article was written some 20 years ago and Ralph, W6SPQ, is now a silent key. I enjoyed his company and shared his interests.

Collins Amateur Radio Equipment

I had visited Ralph, W6SPQ, on a couple of occasions and thoroughly enjoyed seeing his wonderful collection of wireless and Amateur Radio parts. In addition to the collection outlined, he was also interested in Collins radio equipment.

In one of his photographs, side by side with his latest state of the art, all singing all dancing, Japanese Kenwood transceiver, he had the legendary Collins 75A4 receiver. It was huge; its front panel was twice the size of the nearby Kenwood rig. I was familiar with the receiver and I agreed with Ralph, it was indeed a 'class' item. Some 20 years after this visit, *QST* printed a wonderful article on this fabulous receiver.

In those far off days, Collins radio equipment was to touch me from time to time. This was both in a commercial and radio amateur terms. In either case, the equipment was a marvel of sound engineering design and implementation. One just knew the equipment was Collins made; it had this special look of quality. Once inside, it further became apparent that the components used were top quality. Wiring techniques and layout were just superb.

In a personal sense, in Amateur Radio terms, the idea of actually owning, for example the 75A4, never entered my head. The renowned S-Line, TX and RX and the KWM-2 (in particular) were released in the early 60's, but the idea of my buying any of it then was out of the question as it was well beyond my financial means at the time.

A strange turn of events here on Norfolk Island led me by the hand back into the world of Collins Amateur Radio equipment. In its simplest form, always a home brewer, I had embarked (in a moment of sheer madness) on building a 21 tube, multiband CW, SSB transceiver. It was known as the LWM-3 and its 1960 design was based on the circuitry of the KWM-2 transceiver.

To avoid being sued (only joking), a number of changes had been made to the actual circuitry of the KWM-2. In a couple of cases a different tube was used and so on and it did not have the PA system of the Collins rig.

You will now see the reason for the 'insanity' statement made earlier, as when I built this unit on Norfolk Island in 2003 it was for the second time. I had previously built it in 1962/3 and I had added a PA section to the LWM-3. It was now almost a KWM-2 and it had certainly been cheaper than the real thing.

I had used the KWM-2 manual to help design the added PA unit. Also, if Collins had done something which I thought to be better, then the LWM-3 circuitry was changed accordingly. It was in using this same approach on the second time around, (using that old original manual) that set me on the road to become a Collins owner. I felt strongly that I would like to own a KWM-2; the real thing.

I hasten to add that from a purely financial point of view, my interest was not in buying a pristine, collector's class unit. On the other hand nor did I wish to purchase junk, for example one with a badly damaged case, front panel, or several missing parts. I knew that whatever I purchased, even if the unit was not working, I should be able to fix it. I knew the KWM-2 circuit frontward and backwards!

Three years down the Collins track, I now own several items of Collins equipment. So far, touch wood, everything I have purchased has been fixable. Often, it has not been easy going and being on Norfolk often does not help. But, there is always someone, within the Collins Collector Association (CCA) group who has been able to help me.

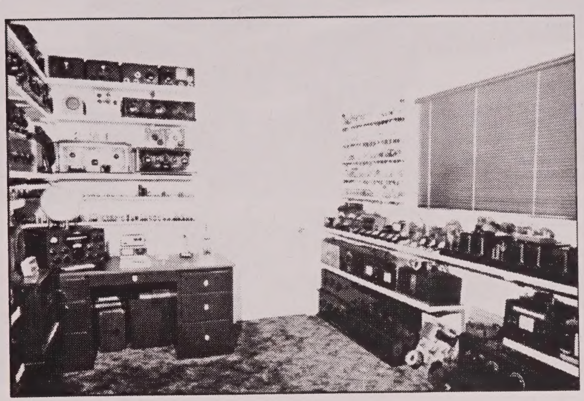
It was the discovery of the Collins Collector Association that showed me that enthusiasm, in Amateur Radio terms, was alive and well. When one thinks of the KWM-2, for example, this transceiver is now over 40 years old. Yet today, if one needs L1, R26, this crystal or that dial part, the chances are good that someone in CCA group will be able to help.

Personally, I have found the membership to be a wonderful asset. The CCA site is full of Collins Technical material. I can even download a complete Collins KWM-2 manual if I wish. I have not done so, as there is something special in my old, severely dog-eared manual, acquired exactly 44 years ago. I even know who sent it to me; his callsign DL4QP (now K9QPL) is on the front cover, although I no longer have his slip of paper originally attached to the front cover. If I look carefully I can still see the staple marks, or is it my imagination? I need reading glasses these days!

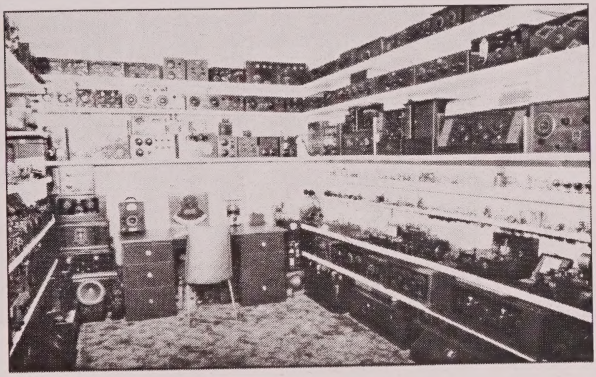
In entering into this Collins group, I feel a sense of belonging. I can answer most of the typical questions being asked by email to the CCA forum, and often do so. "I have just purchased a KWM-2 (for example) on e-Bay; this is wrong, that is not working, what can I do?" Endless help answers are available immediately from members and these usually straight to the point. "Check R26, have you tried this, or that?" There is a wonderfully alive and on-going dialogue among enthusiasts who know the specific rig in intimate detail.

Being a member has also given me several new Amateur Radio friends and in also helping others within CCA, I, too, have been a source of help.

If I need this part or that part, if I meet an unknown fault, there is someone there with a possible answer. I enjoy having the skills to enable me to repair these less than perfect units, bringing them back to life, making them look almost like new. In my view, the CCA is a wonderful example of the friendship within our hobby of Amateur Radio.

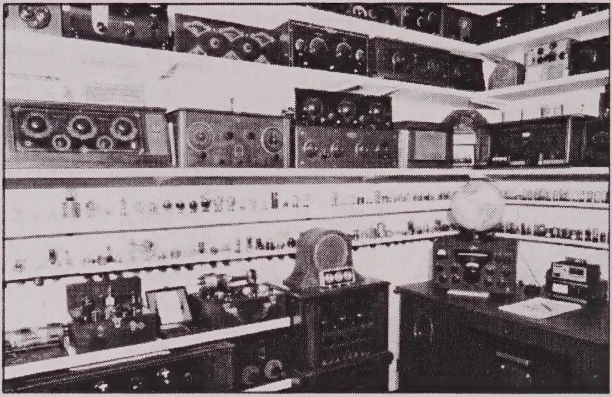


Part of a huge collection owned by W6SPQ (SK).

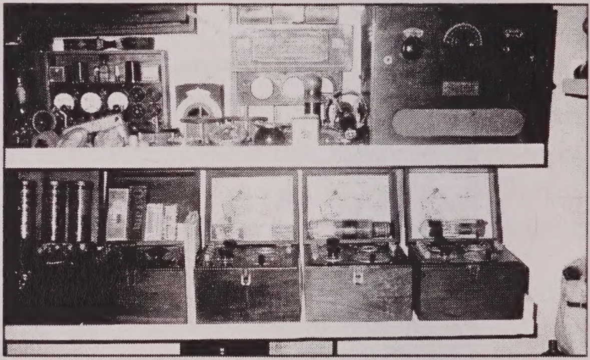


Another roomful of the W6SPQ (SK) collection.

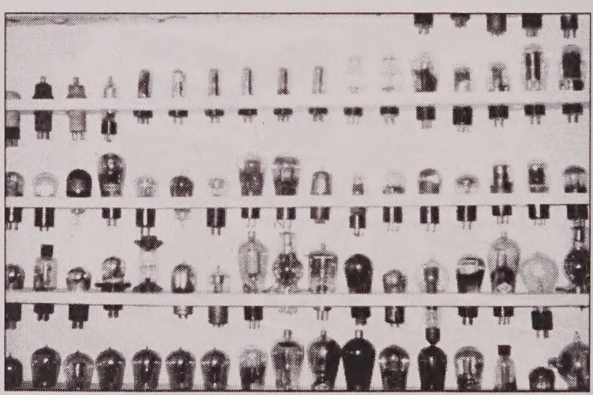
Old equipment room, the W6SPQ (SK) collection.



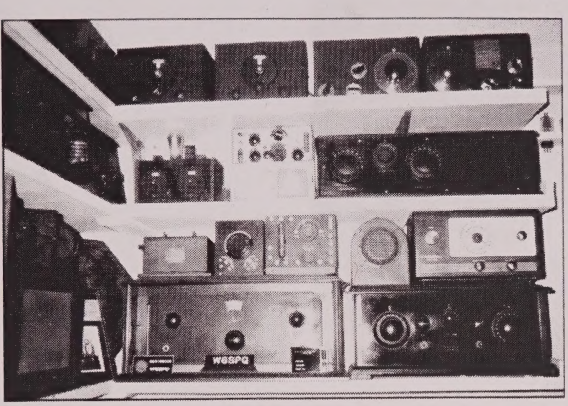
Note the more modern Collins 75A4 receiver.



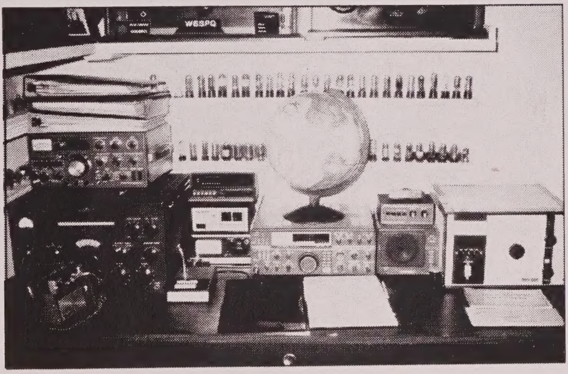
Part of the W6SPQ SK collection of old test gear.



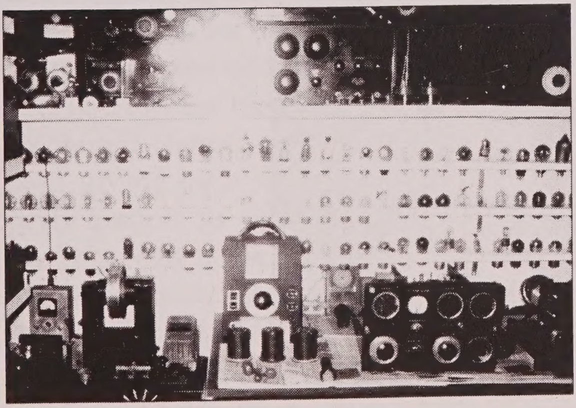
A huge collection of old tubes (valves), W6SPQ (SK).



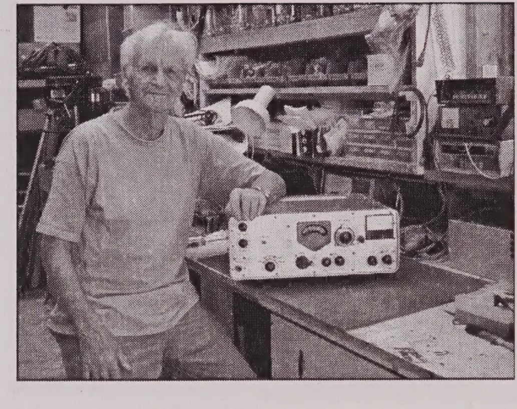
W6SPQ (SK) collection – vintage test equipment.



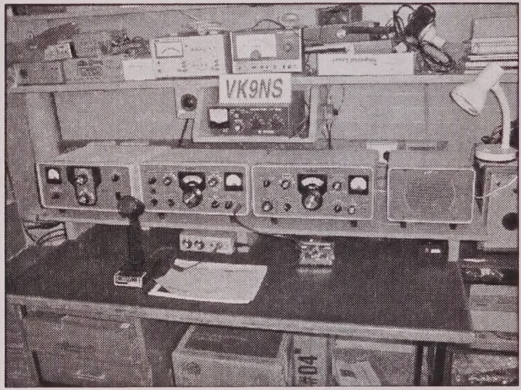
W6SPQ (SK) station in the midst of his collection.



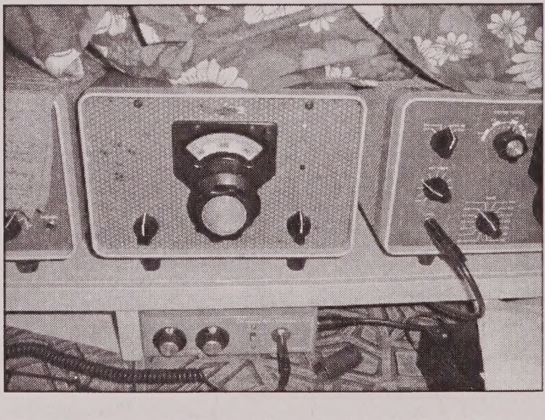
Another section of the vintage test gear section.



Jim, a home brew LWM 3 (GE Ham news.)



Collins S-3 line with 30L1 Linear (2007).



Home Brew, PTO for use with KWM-2 (2006).

Chapter 34

THE HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION

1979 – 2006

As I started to write this chapter about the HIDXA, dates rushed into my mind; the association was nearly 30 years old. In another, quickest of calculations, I realised that it had been in existence for a large part of my life within Amateur Radio.

As related earlier, HIDXA had been initially formed to deal with the possibility of an Amateur Radio DXpedition to Heard Island. In its basic sense, it certainly served its purpose as it became the vehicle that allowed negotiations to take place in this matter. However, once it was possible, in legal terms, for a private expedition to visit Heard Island I turned the thoughts of HIDXA towards financial matters.

I had always visualized that an Amateur Radio group of six would charter a vessel and that we would all share the cost, giving each of us our own sense of satisfaction and participation in the project. In Port Moresby, we were dealing with a deep-sea fishing group in Perth and they offered a means of getting to Heard Island. They proposed that whilst we were ashore doing 'our thing', they would fish in the vicinity. It was not cheap, and they were asking around $20,000 for seven days on Heard. In short, I never ever thought of an extension to this self imposed mandate.

The organisation of the Amateur Radio element was work enough.

It took time, but the difficulties of funding a DXpedition brought me face to face with reality. I soon realised that a party of (say) 6 radio amateurs each paying US $3000 would barely be able to fund even the basic boat charter costs. Shortly after, HIDXA set about trying to raise additional funds by informing the various DX outlets of our proposals, since they were in touch with the DXer on a regular basis.

As a result, we received approximately US $750 in the way of donations, which when added to the money to be paid by the participants came to US $18,750. It became obvious that this would not be enough to get us to and from Heard Island; this money would cover the basic charter costs only. It was now apparent that an expedition to Heard Island funded only by Amateur Radio interests alone would be impossible. The base of this expedition would have to be broadened to include other interested parties.

It was to be some time before Heard Island became a reality and my being based in downtown Papua New Guinea was not at all helpful. However, once I had moved to Norfolk Island in 1980 I continued with the idea of a Heard Island expedition, and things started to move ahead.

As time passed, it became evident that the scale of the actual expedition would have to be much larger than originally envisaged. We now had many people from various professions and with different aims who might share in the cost. As we now know, the actual funding was still quite inadequate to deal with any major unforeseen circumstances. I do not believe that any one of us could have foreseen that extension of some six weeks to the original time-frame. If we had, NONE of us would have gone!

I also had the (quite incorrect) perception that 'DXers' would help (in financial terms) once they had worked this rare DX country, but this was to all extents 'pie in the sky.' As it turned out, the balance of the funding for the DXpedition came from Kirsti and me.

Even today, when on occasion I look into the VK0JS log (now in computer form) I dismally stare at the 100s of blank spaces in terms of QSLing. It seems to me that hundreds of people worked the operation with no interest in getting a QSL card. However, on a more positive note, I do feel a sense of achievement in that all DXpeditions to Heard Island including the HIE mountaineering one and others later were possible only as a result of my visits to Canberra. The new legislation allowed for any well meaning group (with many caveats) to stay on Heard Island, and getting this legislation on the statute book was what I achieved in my months of dealings (as HIDXA) with the Australian Government Antarctic Division.

Heard Island was one of the many DXpeditions I was to eventually undertake, but I had learned a valuable lesson. If ever I organised any future multi-operator DXpedition operators, it would have to be funded up-front. I would never again have the concept that "Once you get back, all will be okay and it will get paid for somehow".

Now, after Heard Island, a brighter side emerged. It took time to sort things out, but on return to Norfolk Island after Dayton and Visalia I made the decision to create the HIDXA Club. Here, I must make a couple of points. I felt that HIDXA Inc. had completed its task; agreed, there had been problems, but these had all been beyond our control. But I also knew that if HIDXA were to have a future membership, as we were then under a cloud of possible litigation over Heard Island it was important that the new membership would not be liable. So, In short, I created the HIDXA Club to sit under a line drawn to separate VK0JS, Heard Island HIDXA Inc., from any future events.

I also had time to think as I headed back to P.N.G. for a two year stay to help recover from the money we had paid towards the Heard Island DXpedition. It was during my time in P.N.G. that Kirsti got her first book *Heard Island Odyssey* together. I was delighted to know that she was writing the true story about our Heard Island DXpedition.

As for myself, I would find it hard to be objective enough to get the story together with not a single note of dissent. At least the true story of all our trials and tribulations during that memorable trip to Heard Island and back would be told and preserved in book form for posterity. Kirsti and I spent many a sked on 20m SSB working on editing the text. I was able to deal with the cover design and photographs in P.N.G., so *Heard Island Odyssey* was published, finally, in March 1986. Twenty years later she has finally sold almost all of the 1000 copies printed.

Our files, still in existence, show that HIDXA was built on a solid footing, in part due to my professional background. Every dollar was accounted for and everyone received a receipt for any money collected, with, in later years, a reservation that a minimum of US $5.00 was paid. All lesser donations received a note of thanks with their QSL card.

With this firm structure in place, my goal for the HIDXA Club was active participation by DXers and real moves to continue with DXpeditions. Our aims would include: participation in trying to help countries with Amateur Radio licensing problems; to help, if at all possible, the poorer of our Amateur Radio colleagues in a 'needed' DXCC country, with donations of equipment; and, if at all possible, to break with entrenched DX groups with limited or self-serving views.

The HIDXA Club kept its name, and although I thought that maybe that HIDXA tag was no longer valid, I felt it would have been nonsense to change the name to 'Harry Brown's DX fraternity', or something similar. We were known as HIDXA and the Club was based on our Heard Island DXpedition. It was good enough for Kirsti and me and as events showed, year after year, good enough for at least a couple of thousands DXers. The road set up by our group would be followed by several other, now prominent, groups in later years.

With my time in P.N.G. over and financial stability regained, I would now be able to get on with my work back on Norfolk Island. Meanwhile, membership of the HIDXA Club had grown, week by week. The 14220 net continued (this was never was an 'HIDXA members only' net), and Mary, KB6CLL, ran a net on 15m and recruited dozens of new members.

Funding for future DXpeditions had now become less of a problem, as the HIDXA Club became better known and recognised throughout the DX community. Over the following 20 years, donations, both in money and equipment, were received for use on our DXpeditions. As we have seen, those DXpeditions were undertaken under the auspices of HIDXA. The HIDXA membership files show that a total membership of some 2,000 DXers participated during this time. The Club also published a regular newsletter and kept in personal touch with members by Christmas cards every year. We were both very active on the Amateur Radio bands, as our individual #1 Honor Roll status testifies.

Norfolk Island was, and still is, a difficult place to organise DXpeditions from. Although there are excellent public communications in place, these are expensive to use. In addition, to even start travelling, one must first get off the Island and of course return. Another matter is the lack of other DX-orientated radio amateurs on the Island. There is no group of eager beavers waiting to help with organizing a DXpedition, or for that matter any other function of the Club. The work has always squarely fallen on both Kirsti's and my own shoulders; done in our spare time when not earning a living. We relied heavily on a number of inputs from VK and, of course, the US DXers. They gave balance to almost all HIDXA decisions taken here.

In this book, I have written about the HIDXA DXpeditions and detailed our work in having Amateur Radio legislation established in Bangladesh and Bhutan. It was Bhutan in particular which proved a hard nut to crack. It took years of work and drained our funds, but resulted in complete success in 2000. It is, of course, understood that many DXers became impatient and many a member let his or her membership of HIDXA lapse. As a result of the increased cost of printing and in particular postage, HIDXA had also been forced to curtail the regular newsletter which members would miss. These days, with internet and e-mail in place, we keep in touch with members by this medium.

There is also the HIDXA Website: www.hidxa.com which has all our activities listed.

Apart from HIDXA DXpeditions, the Club has been in a position to also support other DXpeditions and these days, is a check point for the IOTA programme.

oooooooo

In writing this Chapter on HIDXA I have found it easy – my book 'The Old Timer' is almost finished with literally just a few pages to go. HIDXA, of course, became a huge part of Kirsti's and my own life. Over the years, the club was to become a major player in the world of DXing. Even the quickest of glances through the chapters of this book shows that we, as a coherent group, certainly covered a lot of territory from our very remote, but wonderful, Island in the South Pacific area.

In the following brief outline, here, in basic terms, is an outline of what HIDXA achieved, and this list is far from complete.

HIDXA Activities

1980 – 2003	Consistent and reliable QSL manager for Paul Linsley, P29PL, Papua New Guinea. All cards printed by HIDXA.
1983	VK9WCY, World Communications Year
1986	Wake Island Ed Campbell, with funds plus a Butternut, HF6V antenna.
1986	5X5GK, Uganda. QSL cards.
1987	Mike, ZD7EL, St Helena Island. QSL cards.
1987	Peter 1 Island. A major contribution was made for this operation.
1987	ZK2EXY with financial help.

We supported several DX groups with donations, for example, the Lynx DX Group, EU DX Foundation, NCDXA and others.

1988	ZL8HV, Raoul Island Meteorology Expedition, with QSL cards.
1988	ZS9, Walvis bay with a donation.
1988	PY0FZ, Fernando de Narohna, cards and donation.
1988	VR6KY, Pitcairn Island. QSL cards.
1989	Bouvet Island a substantial donation.
1989	Mellish Reef, donation.
1989	Yemen 4W0PA, QSL cards.
1990	Sudan, substantial donation.
1990	Angola D6 substantial donation.
1990	Dusty, ZM7VS, Chatham Island. QSL cards.
1991	Desecheo, a substantial donation.
1991	YA0RR, Afghanistan, substantial donation.
1991	Adriano, 5R8GN, donation.

Kingdom of Bhutan

1990	Equipment donation to Wireless Division, Thimphu, for use by Pradhan, A51PN.
1992	Later HIDXA made a donation of several rigs, beam antenna and amplifier, for use in the proposed Thimphu Radio Club.

Andaman Islands, VU4

1995	Donation of modern equipment, including beam and vertical, for use by Mani, VU2JPS and Mala, VU2MTC, was air freighted to Port Blair. Later the equipment was used Mani and Mala on their transfer back to India.

VK IOTA

1999	VK8NSB/P Groote Eyeland Operation by Stuie, VK8NSB. 2 April – 19 April 1999
1999	VK8ML, Melville Island 4 November – 9 November 1999.
1999	VK8CI, Crocker Island 11 November – 15 November 1999.

HIDXA became (and still is) an IOTA Checkpoint for the RSGB Islands on the Air Programme. In the earlier days, HIDXA covered Asia (Japan), Australia and the Pacific Islands. I had been writing regularly in a major JA magazine on both DX and IOTA matters. The IOTA programme then finally 'took off' in Japan, and the JA stations now run their own check point. YAESU, Japan, had taken a great interest in this 'Islands on the Air' programme, and they remain a major sponsor of IOTA.

As we have also seen, HIDXA was to become involved in both A5, Bhutan and later, in S2, Bangladesh in Amateur Radio licensing terms. It must be said that Bangladesh was the easier of the two, in the sense that the country did have a recognised Telecom authority, although it was hi-jacked during the regime of President Ershad. Once democracy returned and the new government was in place, it then became a matter of 'faith or trust' to permit the return of the Amateur Radio Service.

In the case of The Kingdom of Bhutan, the scenario was quite different. As measures of democracy were gradually introduced, government Ministers had more freedom. In the Communications Ministry, now a separate entity, it was seen that major changes were required and the new Telecommunications Act became law in March 2000. One major result of this Act was the introduction of the Amateur Radio Service in 2000. HIDXA was instrumental in the preparation of the basic framework of the Amateur Radio Legislation.

HIDXA also produced ***A Background History of Amateur Radio in the Kingdom of Bhutan: the Fifties until 1995.*** This document was placed with the RSGB, ARRL, WIA and also within Bhutan itself (the Ministry of Communications and others).

The Bhutanese Ambassador to India received a copy and HIDXA received a gracious letter of thanks and his kind acknowledgement. From Bangladesh, Ambassador Tobgyel wrote to me from Dhaka: "Without your work on this project, the history of those early days of wireless in Bhutan would have remained undocumented".

I think that now, looking back, the events of April 2000 regarding Bhutan were to finally sour my outlook on DXing. Simply put, without the integrity of Deputy Minister of Communications, Dasho Leki Dorji, Dasho T. Yonten and others in government, HIDXA would have been happily buried by the leader and others of the A52A operation. As things transpired, the HIDXA-sponsored operations of Yonten, A51TY and A52JS started before A52A and finished two weeks after the A52A operation had closed down.

It was generous of some members of the A52A team to visit me personally in Paro and say thanks; others were conspicuous by their absence.

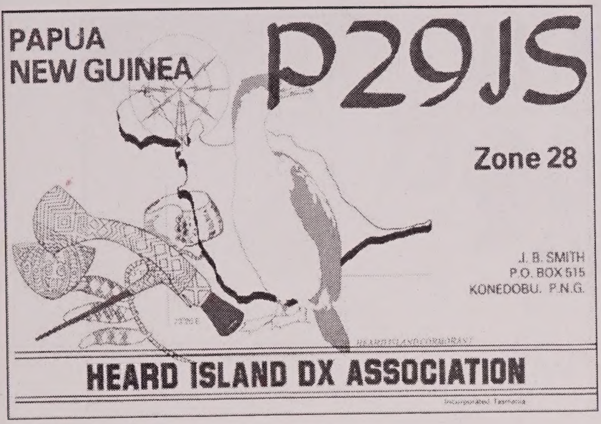
Rightfully, the first ever QSO from Bhutan, on the 1st April, 2000, under the 2000 Legislation was made by Yonten, A51TY - a Bhutanese national. In his early days, Yonten was very active and I can personally vouch that he had never lost his professional CW skills.

Having said that, I am not sure how you feel about HIDXA. You are reading this book, so our activities must be of some interest. I hope you agree with me that, despite severe and often mind-boggling difficulties, not least of which is living on this tiny island out in the blue, the HIDXA membership has a great deal to be proud of.

Amateur Radio became special to me in the late 40s. I admit to being dragged screaming and kicking, like a spoilt child, into this great hobby. Little did I know what was to lie ahead!

To quote that wonderful Bhutanese saying; "Tashi Delek" – may your journey be a safe one.

73 Jim, VK9NS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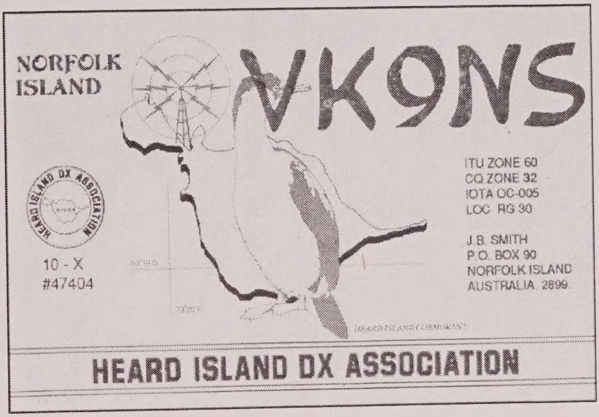
NEW GUINEA
P29JS
Zone 28
J. B. SMITH
P.O. BOX 515
KONEDOBU. P.N.G.
HEARD ISLAND CORMORANT
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION
Incorporated Tasmania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ITU ZONE 60
CQ ZONE 32
IOTA OC-005
LOC RG 30
J.B. SMITH
P.O. BOX 90
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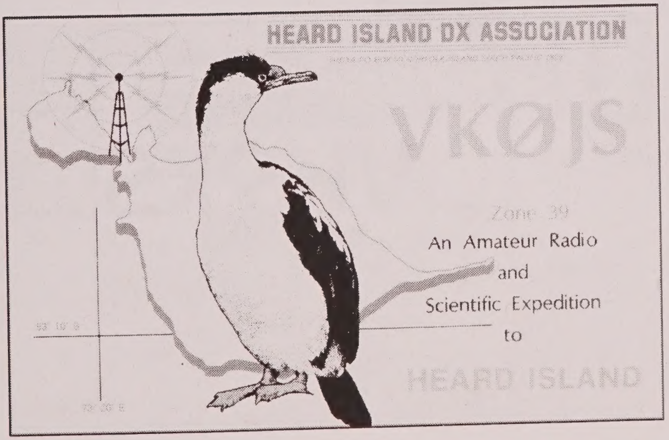
AUSTRALIA. 2899.
HEARD ISLAND CORMORANT
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION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Zone 39
An Amateur Radio
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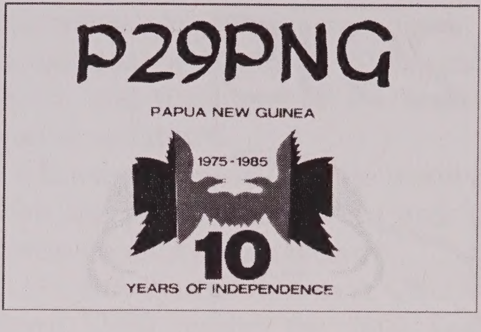
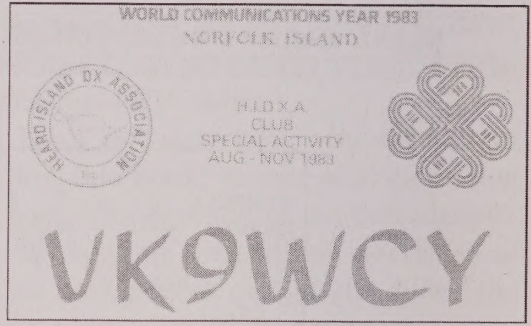
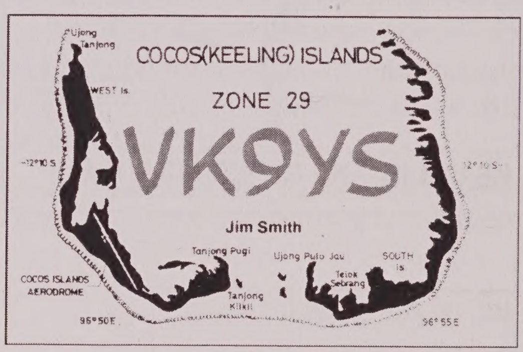
Scientific Expedition
to
HEARD ISLAND


P29PNG
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
1975 - 1985
10
YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE


WORLD COMMUNICATIONS YEAR 1983
NORFOLK ISLAND
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION
INC
H.I.D.X.A.
CLUB
SPECIAL ACTIVITY
AUG - NOV 1983
VK9WCY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ZONE 29
VK9YS
Jim Smith
Ujong Tanjong
WEST Is.
12°10 S
12°10 S
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SOUTH Is
Telok Sebrang
COCOS ISLANDS AERODROME
Tanjong Kilkil
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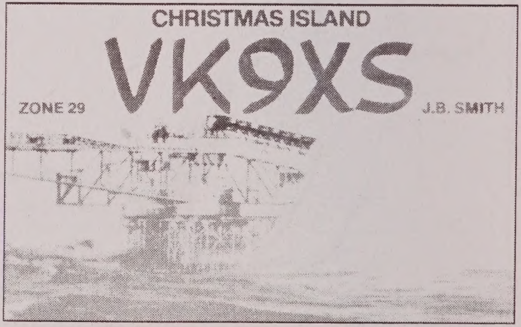
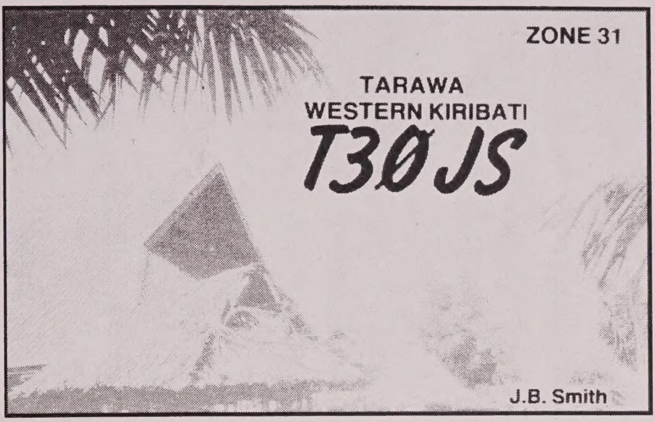
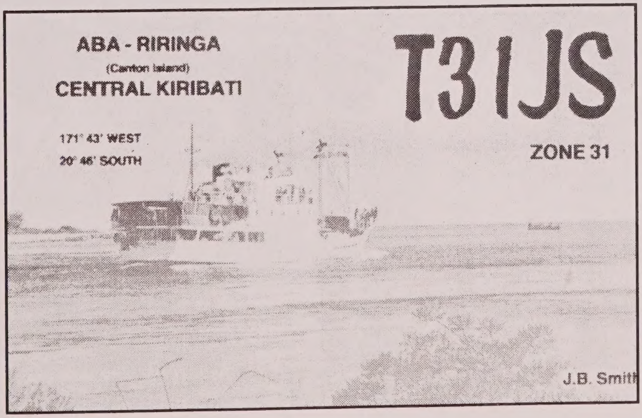
96°55E


CHRISTMAS ISLAND
VK9XS
ZONE 29
J.B. SMITH


ZONE 31
TARAWA
WESTERN KIRIBATI
T30JS
J.B. Smith

HOWLAND ISLAND
NO1Z/KH1
Zone 31
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION, INC.
HIDXA, PO BOX 30, NORFOLK ISLAND, AUSTRALIA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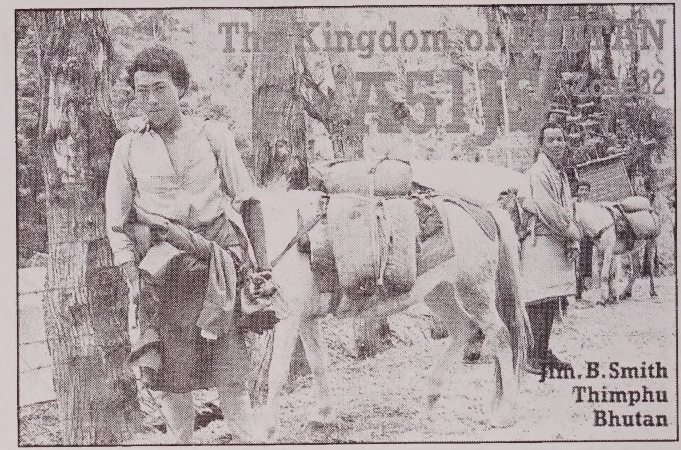
ZONE 31
J.B. Smith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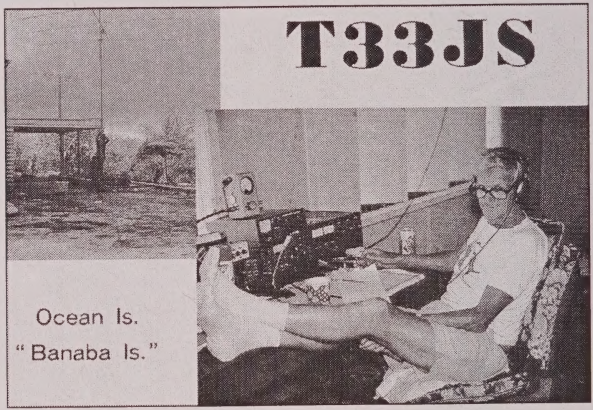
Jim. B. Smith
Thimphu
Bhutan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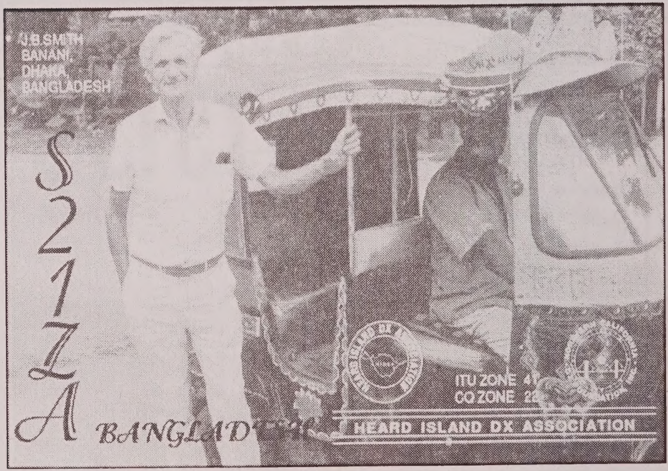
" Banaba Is."


J.B.SMITH
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DHAKA,
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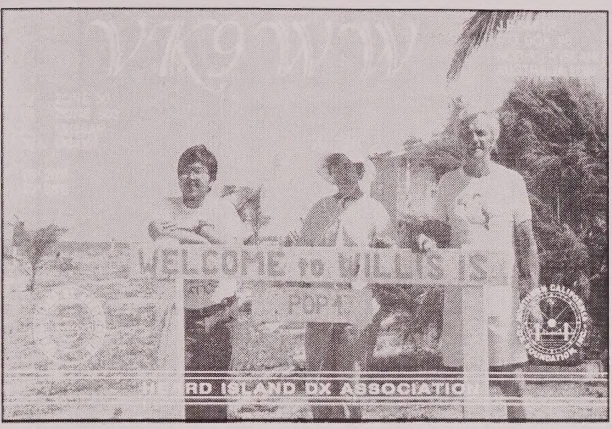
ITU ZONE 41
CQ ZONE 22
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION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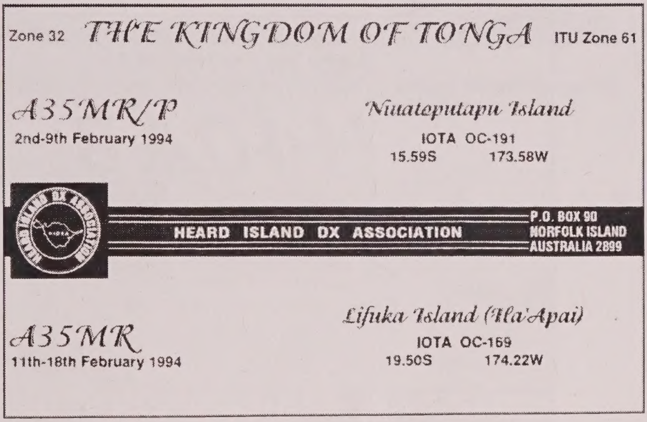
WELCOME to WILLIS IS.
POP 4
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION



Zone 32 *THE KINGDOM OF TONGA* ITU Zone 61

A35MR/P
2nd-9th February 1994

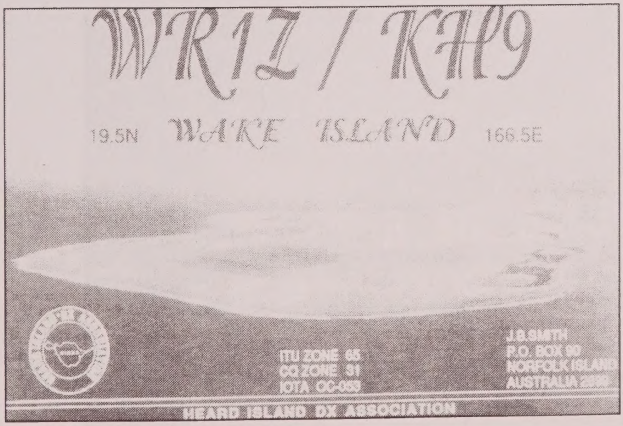
Niuatoputapu Island
IOTA OC-191
15.59S 173.58W

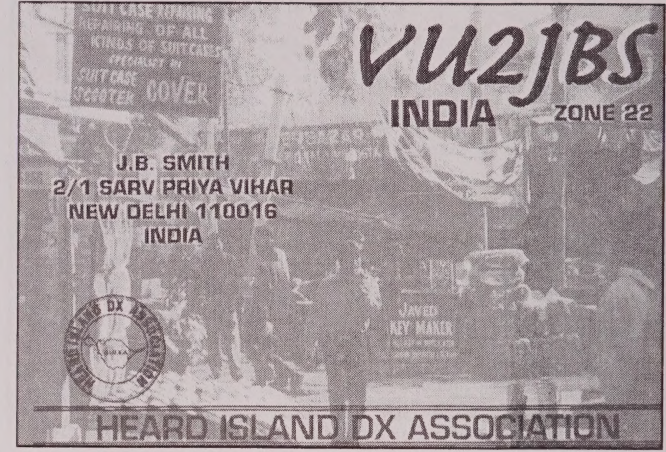
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION

P.O. BOX 90
NORFOLK ISLAND
AUSTRALIA 2899

Lifuka Island (Ha'Apai)
IOTA OC-169
19.50S 174.22W

A35MR
11th-18th February 1994


WR1Z / KH9
19.5N WAKE ISLAND 166.5E
ITU ZONE 65
CQ ZONE 31
IOTA OC-053
J.B.SMITH
P.O. BOX 90
NORFOLK ISLAND
AUSTRALIA 2899
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION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2/1 SARV PRIYA VIHAR
NEW DELHI 110016
INDIA
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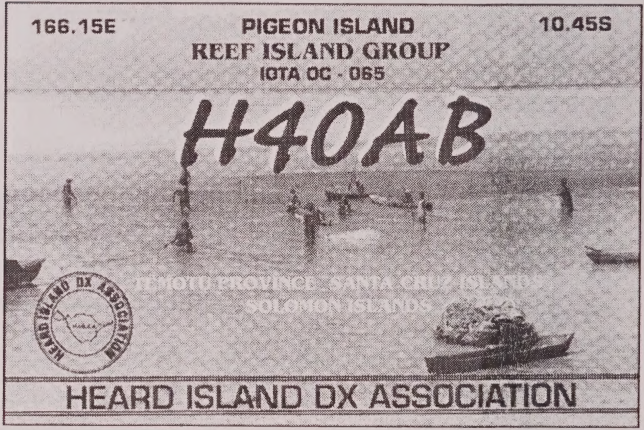
166.15E
PIGEON ISLAND
REEF ISLAND GROUP
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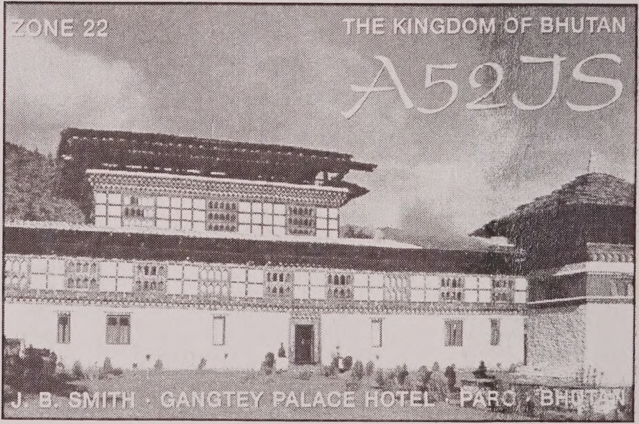
TEMOTU PROVINCE SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS
SOLOMON ISLANDS
HEARD ISLAND DX ASSOCIATION


ZONE 22
THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN
A52JS
J. B. SMITH · GANGTEY PALACE HOTEL · PARO · BHUTAN

HEARD IS. DX ASSOCIATION
BHUTAN AGENCY

The HIDXA and Bhutan Agency office down town Norfolk until 2000.

Chapter 35

The Full Circle

Singapore 2004

After my vacation trip to the UK in 2004 I had made arrangements to travel back to Norfolk Island via Manila. I had a friend there who had a few items of Collins equipment for sale and he was pleased that, just maybe, these items would go to me. We had known each other for many years. In addition, Manila would provide a short break in the long haul from the UK back to the other side of the world.

My old friend Murphy was up to his old tricks again, and a couple of weeks before my departure from the UK Manila was more or less shut down due to internal political instability. So my son, Bruce, suggested that instead of Manila, Singapore would be a good choice for a short stay. He thought that I should stay at Changi Village rather than down-town Singapore. It seemed to be a brilliant idea as I am not all that keen on the huge hotels of the city - been there and done that! With the magic of his computer, Bruce had my Manila route cancelled and replaced with a Singapore stop over, not to mention a hotel booking in the Meridian hotel in Change Village. In due course I departed from Heathrow airport for Norfolk Island, via Singapore.

Without getting too sentimental over it all, I realised that turning the clock back to the late 40's early 50's would be simplicity itself. I seem to be very lucky as I have an excellent memory and, in fact, the trip would certainly stretch it to the limit. By the time I got to Singapore, the hotel had officially changed its name from the 'Meridien Hotel' to the 'Changi Village Hotel'!! I was to find that they meant what they said as it was a mere couple of hundred yards walk, down the road to the village proper. The hotel was well-named.

As mentioned earlier in this book, in those wireless days of the late 40's, on finishing my training I was posted to RAF Changi, Singapore. In late 1947, the voyage of the *SS Dilwara* with calls at Port Said, Aden and Colombo took just over 4 weeks. The troop ship was greeted with yells and shrieks of derision as we went down the Suez Canal by British troops already serving in the area. The banks of the canal are quite close, so the cries of 'get your knees brown!' and similar phrases were clearly heard.

On arrival at Singapore, those posted to RAF Changi were uplifted from the wharf area and, after about an hour, arrived at the camp area. I and the rest of our group were allocated our accommodation area and soon after I was unpacking and settling in. It would take several weeks to at least begin to know the 'who, what and where' of RAF station life.

RAF Changi on those days was a large base, requiring considerable infrastructure. The administration, health, pay, food plus all the squadron requirements of fuel and spares meant a large number of personnel. I have no idea of the population of RAF Changi in those days, but an educated guess of a thousand might be near the mark.

The main road from the city of Singapore ran to Changi Village, en route passing the walls of the infamous Changi Jail. Before reaching Changi village a left hand turn-off led to the gates of RAF Changi. The bus service stopped there, BUT, if I remember correctly, only certain buses were allowed to continue through the base to Changi Village. Meanwhile, if one had not made that left hand turn for RAF Changi, one continued a few more miles to the bus terminus in Changi Village.

The village proper consisted of a row of shops on either side of the road just outside the camp area. The road continued through the village and the camp and out the gates at the other side, thus connecting back onto the Changi Road and with a right hand turn, back onto the road to Singapore. From the camp area the village was within easy walking distance and depended on the trade from the camp.

We, the personnel of the camp, had considerable attraction for the locals in that being paid every couple of weeks, it added up to a huge cash flow to the village stores and shops.

By the way 'Credit' was very easy to obtain and it was often handy to be able to borrow a few dollars until next payday! In those days, Service pay was abysmal and these post-war days were hard times in the UK. However, most times we survived okay as our needs were very simple. We could get to and from Singapore on the Changi Bus service and the fare was not much – I seem to remember 10 or 20 cents. Once in town, there were several Forces type amenities which were shared by the three services, of course. I could buy a decent meal (better than camp food), could go for a swim and so on. It all helped to overcome the sometimes tedious life of the camp itself.

Within Changi camp we had a Malcolm Club, Chalet Club, cinema and the camp had a radio station providing music and news. There were numerous sports facilities; a football and cricket field and by all accounts an excellent golf course. Those days I played competitive table tennis and this could be reasonably energetic. I would say that I was very healthy back then and still am for that matter.

It was a fair 'hoof' to the Malcolm Club (we walked everywhere in those days), but again, a decent meal was an incentive – a protected swimming area and a spacious table tennis area. It was there that I learned to swim soon after my arrival at Changi. I have never thought of myself as a good swimmer, but it was a welcome activity within the usual swelter of Singapore weather. It all made a welcome relief from camp style life and was really a weekend activity; usually the Squadron was 'stood down' from Saturday noon until the Monday morning.

Meanwhile, with a quantum leap back through time, I am now standing in the Changi Village of the late 40's! Almost 60 years have passed and just maybe I will be able to renew my thoughts about those far-off days.

After the briefest of walks from the Changi Village Hotel I found that Changi Village was still there in all its glory, although quite different to those old tin-roofed shops of the late 40's and early 50's. There was still a row of shops either side of this last section of the road before entering Changi camp, which of course is still there. The SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) now utilise the base and many of the amenities of the old days.

These days the shops appear to me to be set further back from the road and are made of brick, instead of the shanty like appearance that I remembered. They are more affluent looking with two flats above each shop providing one for living and one for letting, to help pay any property mortgage. These days they serve a completely different public, although I guess it is still tied to Changi Camp.

It also seemed to me to be a village of eating places outside the many restaurants. A wide range of food was available and one could eat inside (mandatory ceiling fans) or outside in the cool of the evening. There was a good choice of very inexpensive dishes, with endless window advertisements showing what the dish looked like!! There were of course other shops in the village, the usual food provision stores, newsagent and other trades. Several shops catered for the tourist trade. I did not see the tailor shops of our days where we were all doing our best to get out of service uniforms into civvies – the 'The Okay Lucky Best British Tailor ' shops I remembered were no longer there!

However, it was to be the following day that I realised that Changi Base was still there and more importantly, that the Changi Road through the camp was open to the public. I made a start by checking just what remained to be seen of the old Changi Camp I had known. Think of a road wending its way through the camp area, but that each separate SAF area on each side is fenced off, with signs labelled this or that unit. All the camp roads still carry the same RAF-style names of those far-off days; one example being Cranwell Road. I was mentally stepping back into the past and it was a strange feeling. It took some time to get my bearings.

I hired a taxi and we headed out of Changi Village through the camp area proper. I realised at one point that we had passed the entrance to the old Malcolm Club area and was to regret that I hadn't stopped and turned the taxi around, saying "Do it now"!

It would have been a special moment to have at least looked over the area of the old club and swimming area. In any case, we then continued down the road and, at the bottom if the hill, I saw St George's Church where Jean and I were married in 1949.

By turning right into the old Cranwell Road, we stopped just outside the church. The whole church area was fenced off (as part of the actual camp) but I was able to take a couple of photos. It was a strange feeling to be there after all those years. Pre-marriage, Jean and I had passed this church many times on the way to the Malcolm Club as I have mentioned before. In due course of time we had been married there.

Continuing our drive up the road, a couple of hundred yards on the left I saw the road down to the old WAAF quarters where Jean had been billeted. The buildings and compound are still there and unused, but I did not go down there as it was a restricted area.

A little further up was another turning, which I used almost daily, as it led to the old RT D/F (Direction Finding) Site. Planes would call up on a certain frequency and the operators would do a D/F fix on them – which was then passed to the tower. "DC 124 your heading from me is now 120 degrees true – please confirm receipt of your heading." "Roger Tower this is DC 124 bearing 120 degrees true" - or traffic to that effect. I was beginning to feel decidedly strange as I climbed those steps up to the old site on top of Changi Hill. I was almost overcome by emotion and memories and the taxi driver was very understanding – he was no youngster himself. Whenever we stopped, he was very interested in my comments about this or that area. The D/F site was a great location, with a superb view of the camp in all directions. In those far off days, Signals had quite a bit of 'junk' up there. The D/F equipment was notorious for its unreliability, but the place had adequate back-up. However, we were forever fixing things. The tea brewed up there was first class, always worth the visit!

Continuing up the road once again, on the left was the old Catholic Church and, unlike St Andrew's Church down the road, it was boarded up and derelict. However, what caught my attention slightly further up was an area on the right hand side of the road. The old Military Police Building was still there, again derelict and boarded up. This was an important area in camp life as one booked in and out of camp there. They even had cells in the place to handle the recalcitrant service man should he fall foul of this or that offence. But what amazed me was the fenced-in area nearby which, to my eye, had not changed one bit. In my time at RAF Changi, this was the motor pool area and that is what it is now. In those days, all service vehicles had to be returned each day to the pool yard and the vehicle checked back into the system. In my own case, I had my own Signals vehicle, as I covered quite a lot of ground (the Tower, the D/F site and so on). It was in this motor pool that I had suffered my collapsed lung incident. It was very strange, but I had been telling my son Stuart about the incident barely a couple of days previously. Here is the story.

I went to pick up my vehicle one morning as usual and had collected the key and signed for the vehicle. I went over to the truck and did my routine inspection, then jumped in to the driver's seat and logged the milometer reading, fuel gauge reading and that was more or less it. I remember starting the truck and having something hitting me violently on the chest and I woke up in 'intensive care' in Changi hospital. Apparently, I had a collapsed lung! The alert guy in the office had heard me start up and started to wonder why I had not moved; he came over to find me collapsed over the steering wheel!

I was in hospital either 10 or 12 days. I have had no further trouble since, except that every time I am X-rayed the system picks me up as possibly having or have had tuberculosis. It is the scar from that collapsed lung incident.

In this same motor pool area, there was to be one further incident with Jean and myself on a newly acquired Triumph motorbike which stalled and would not restart. I had resorted to pushing the bike to the top of the slope outside the same yard and running it down the slope and letting out the gear. I finally gave up, leaving the bike in the yard and the mechanic (bless him) said he would check it for me. I got the bike back a couple of days later, all fixed. The diagnosis was a short circuit on the sparking plug wiring from the Magneto! Ah well, everyone to his or her trade.

Moving on up the road, on the left, I was able to find my old block where I first lived on arrival at Changi – it was still there, but also fenced in with road access open. I noticed that several of the 'then' nearby blocks had been demolished, including the notorious kitchen and messing area of those old days.

I took a couple of other photos in the area of the old cinema and for another reason, in that there is a photo somewhere of my old Triumph motorbike at this same corner.

A quick run down this road would return us to the Changi Road and a left turn would take us back to the village area. We would have completed a fairly large circle run through the camp area. Then it would be back to the hotel and I would settle up with the taxi driver who had been very good company.

On turning on to the Changi Road, I got the driver to stop, as on the corner was our old Post Office building. It is now all boarded up, but it brought back a few memories as I had posted a few letters and QSL cards there. I was now ready to call it a day, but on turning round to return to the taxi I suddenly realised that across the main Changi Road was the entrance to the old Wireless Workshop of my No. 48 Squadron Days. I had forgotten that I had often walked this road, although mainly the daily truck dumped us in Squadron lines.

The area was fenced off from the road but I went over to the side of the road and took a picture of the entrance road. On turning round, there was an SAF sergeant standing looking at me. 'What are you doing?' 'Photography is not permitted!" He had a mobile phone and was nattering to someone and he then informed me that my photographs would have to be inspected and perhaps they would be confiscated!

In due course, a SAF Land Rover with a Lt. and three soldiers arrived. The problem was that none of them could take responsibility. Once reported, matters had to take a certain course and they wanted me to go with them! I had taken no photographs of any importance but the answer was that 'they' would have to see them in any case!

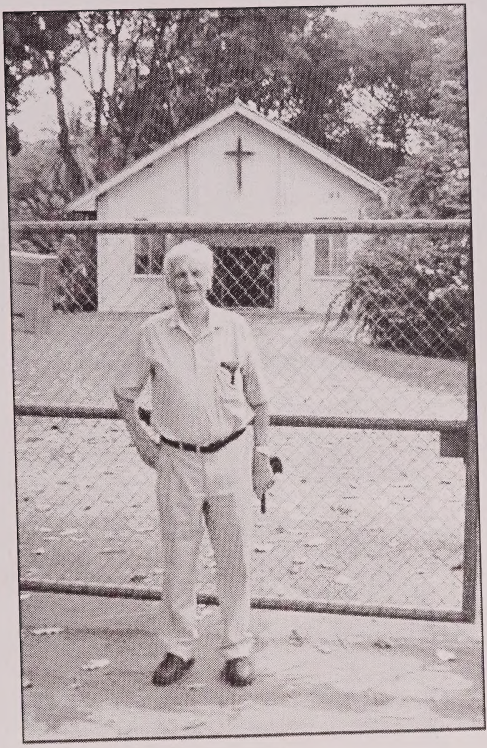
I won't bore you with the gory details, but I quickly got rid of the taxi, as I just did not want the driver to get into any trouble. We ended up at the entrance to the SAF camp area – the old Changi Road entrance to RAF Changi of the old days. It lay slightly further down that camp road from the motor pool area. An hour or so later, the whole thing was dismissed and I was driven back to the hotel with apologies. It was all a bit silly in a way, but then again, there was no clear sign indicating 'No Photography' and there was no actual access to any SAF sites as they were all fenced off.

They were very interested in my RAF Changi days and, of course, my involvement in the early days of SAF technical training. I was very naughty and mentioned that I had been Chief Training Officer with SAFTEC holding the honorary rank of Major! Anything to get myself out of a possible spell in the cells!

Later on, I went back into the village and was very lucky to find a link with those old days as one of the local camera shops had opened up in 1950. He remembered the 'other' camera store and that led to him showing me photos of the old Changi village. I also found out about an ex-Changi Society that still keeps an eye and ear on those who were part of the overall RAF Changi story.

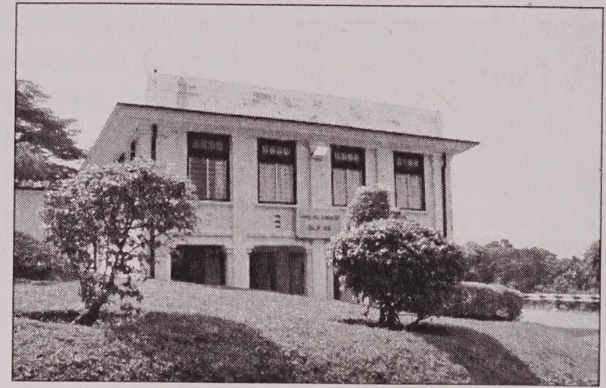
Generally, I felt very lucky that at this late stage of it all, so much has been achieved. It was very special for me to be back on Changi camp refreshing all those old memories of my own early days at RAF Changi, Car Nicobar and then of Jean and myself. Of course, upon marriage, our days of billeting at Changi had gone and in future we would base our life on being together.

In all respects, I felt that I had now travelled a full circle spanning almost 60 years. Singapore had instilled in me the multi-racial make-up of the world. I had started my Amateur Radio activities there and on Car Nicobar. This starting point was to motivate my travels to Germany, Saudi Arabia, Papua New Guinea, then on to a new life on Norfolk Island with a deep interest in our hobby and the world of DXing. I had quite literally turned a full circle spanning 60 years. I had finally become an Old Timer!

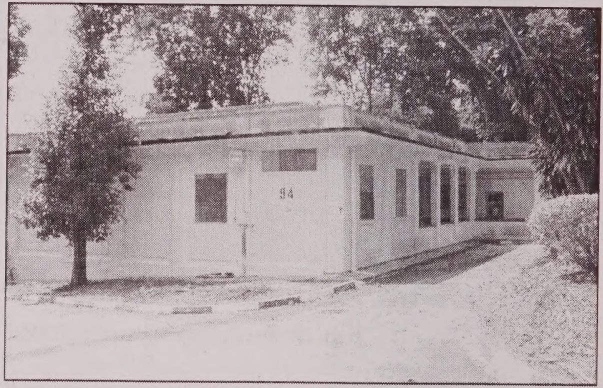


Jim, St Andrews Church, 2004.

Changi Camp - St Andrews Church, 2004.

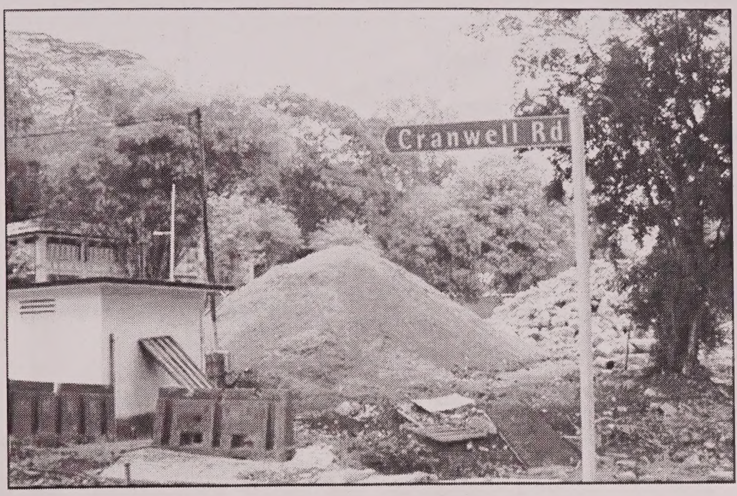


RAF Changi Days – the station commander's house.



In RAF Changi days this was the station cinema.

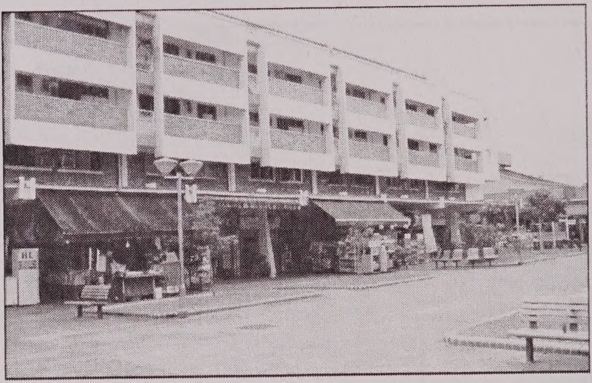
These steps led to the RAF Changi RF/DF site.


Cranwell Rd

Changi Camp street sign, road was named after RAF Cranwell.

Changi Village

Now we know where we are – Changi Village, 2004.



La difference! Changi Village shopping area, 2004.

2004 days, Indian shopkeeper in Changi Village.

SUBWAY
Vitagen
AQUA
AQUA

Inside one of the many Changi Village stores. 2004.

Carlsberg
Congratulations

Much more choice than those far-off Tong Sing days.

Acknowledgements

It is a wonderful feeling to have this book 'The Old Timer' of mine finished after what seems an age.

Without encouragement and assistance it is admitted that the reality of 'The Old Timer' would never have been possible. Norfolk Island can feel very isolated at times.

I am indebted to the Aberdeen Journal office, Aberdeen in granting me permission to use the seven (copyright protected) photographs shown in Chapter 1 of 'The Old Timer'. These and over 200 more of their old WWII stock library pictures were used in a book called ***Aberdeen at War*** by Paul Harris, published by Lomond Books.

The quality of the black and white material is stunning. These pictures (among thousands of others) documented wartime events in Aberdeen and north-east Scotland. As a teenager, these almost daily events left a strong impression – in fact a never to be forgotten image.

In the area of editing I acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Bob Winn, W5KNE an old friend of many years. Then my sons Stuart and Bruce with their wide knowledge of the publishing world helped me with suggested changes to tighten up the chapter contents. Then to my wife Kirsti, who apart from having to live with this monster (the book I mean!) helped with several edits, changes of emphasis in several areas. Without this help 'The Old Timer' would have slipped into oblivion – literally hundreds of sheets of papers of notes and scribbles. All material was initially typed by 'yours truly' as there are few who can read my scribble called handwriting.

To an old friend of mine Larry, AH8LG who with his knowledge of Graphics was able to take my basic idea of my book cover and transform it into what we see today. Personally I think he did a great job. He also designed the CD Title material.

'The Old Timer' is now a reality, many thanks to all.

The Old Timer

Jim, VK9NS

In the throw-away society of today it was noticeable to me that Winchester, England recycled its many unwanted items in a similar manner to the way we do it on Norfolk Island. At the local tip, Bruce and I found this radio which had been removed from the general rubbish and put aside to be stored undercover in a separate area to be available for anyone who wanted it. It was in a very nice but non-working condition. It eventually ended up with me back at Stuart's house. It was there that I fixed the dial mechanism, put a new electrolytic capacitor, replaced a dial light, cleaned up a couple of dry joints and Bingo it worked. These old valve (tube) wireless (radio) sets have a "hard to beat" quality. I suddenly realized when I came across this picture that I looked very much an old timer.

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